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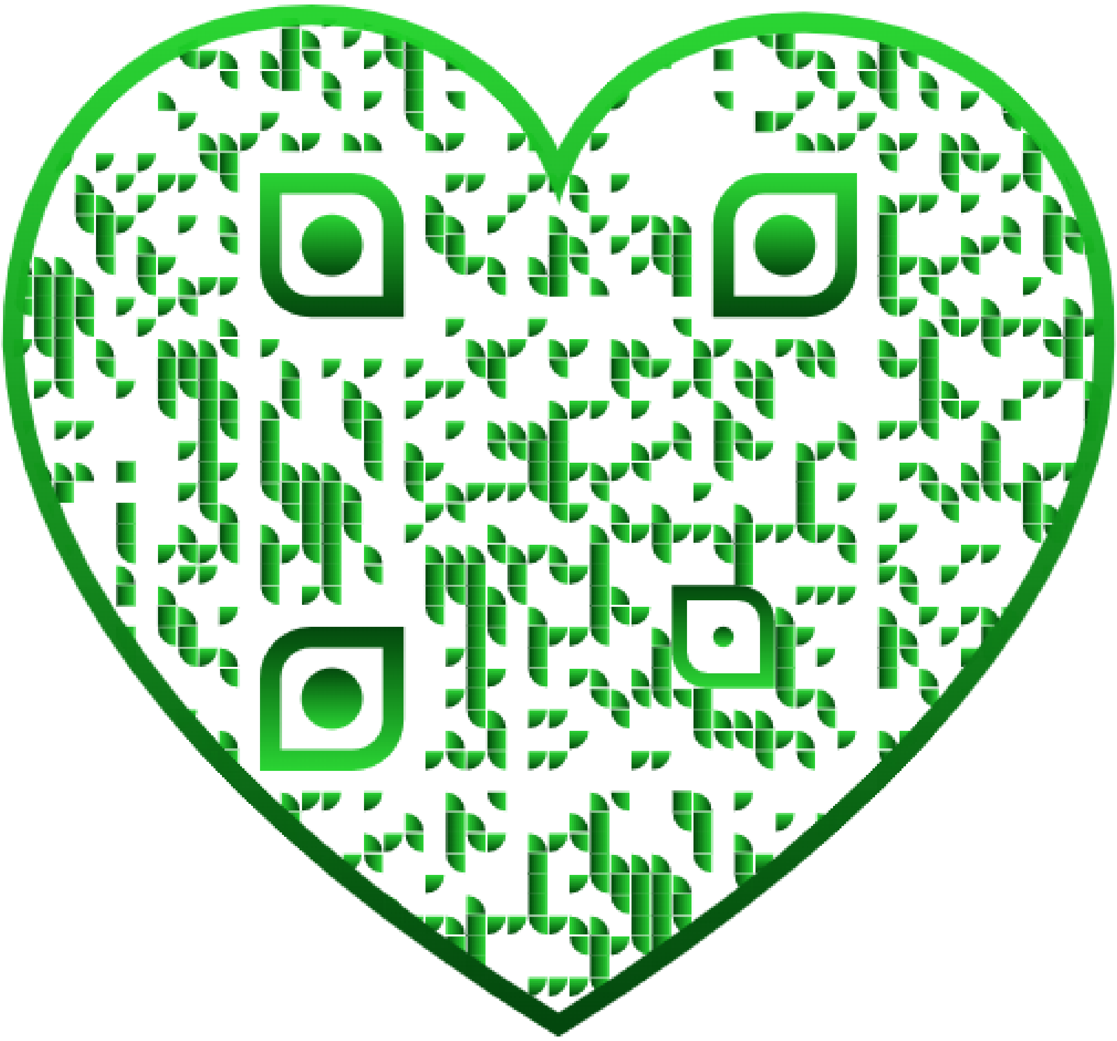

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Amateur GARDENING 141 years of practical advice
1884 The world's oldest gardening magazine 2025

A warm welcome

The best down-to-earth gardening advice

With each and every issue of *Amateur Gardening* magazine, the behind-the-scenes reality is that our family of experts get very excited about what to write for you, our dear readers.

The process invariably involves some actual gardening while we mull ideas to enable us to bring the on-the-ground reality to print! Yes, of course we mainly plan ahead way in advance, but we are real hands-on, practical gardeners and we love what we do. This enables us to bring you the latest tips and growing advice to help boost your results around our tried-and-tested methods as they evolve over time, season to season. There's no standing still here - well, only to enjoy the garden with a warming tea in hand and maybe do some wonderful wildlife watching as the sustainable gardening ideas flow.

So it was with incredible, typical *AG* excitable delight that we learnt the magazine has been shortlisted for the Garden Media Guild's prestigious Publication of the Year award for 2025. This is the first time *Amateur Gardening* has ever been on the shortlist and, lest we forget, it is only two years since this gem of a magazine, the world's oldest gardening magazine no less, was teetering on the brink of closure.

Many of our passionate writers are also on the shortlist for Practical Journalist of the Year, including Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Mike Palmer and Stephanie Hafferty. Mike Palmer is also nominated for Gardening Columnist of the Year. Last year *AG* was shortlisted for the Beth Chatto Environmental Award, Toby Buckland won Gardening Columnist of the Year, and I was named Practical Journalist of the Year. It has been an incredible but rollercoaster-like 24 months that have further cemented our position in leading the way with practical, everyday gardening. We really are thrilled.

In the past two years we have rebranded *AG* in a new fortnightly format and brought accessible, sustainable methods of gardening to a wider audience. We've been doing extremely well on the newsstands, holding our own against publications with, to be honest, much bigger budgets. We are punching above our weight as the saying goes, and I would like to personally thank you, each and every reader, for your continued support. We do this for you.

I'd like to also take this opportunity to highlight some of the fantastic special subscription offers available right now via the Kelsey website, which save money (at least 50%), deliver extra free seeds and also ensures your fortnightly gardening friend is delivered direct to your door. There really are some cracking offers available right now.

In this issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Mandy Bradshaw, Andrew Oldham, Liz Zorab, Nick Hamilton, Rosie Irving, Toby Buckland and Ellen Mary.

We hope you enjoy everything we have put together for you.

Please keep writing in. We love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill,
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Editorial
Editor Kim Stoddart
News editor Ruth Hayes
Editorial consultant Sue Bradley
E-mail: Editor@amateurgardening.com
Website: www.amateurgardening.com

Management
CEO Steve Kendall
Managing director Fiona Mercer
Group publisher Daisy Bury
Group web editor Rachael Harper
Subscriptions marketing manager
Claire Aspinall
Retail director Steve Brown

Any general questions
Kelsey customer service team
01959 543 747
cs@kelsey.co.uk

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Distribution in UK
Frontline Distribution Solutions
2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT

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Advertisement sales
Head of Commercial Julia Barrass
Julia.Barrass@kelsey.co.uk
Sales Karen Davies
01959 543536 | Karen.davies@kelsey.co.uk

Design
Lee Caple

Production
Head of ad print and design Nick Bond
01732 447006
production@talkmediasales.co.uk

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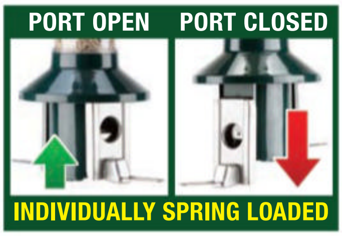

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Contact us:
- **Email:** Editor@amateurgardening.com
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NEXT ISSUE OUT
29 November 2025

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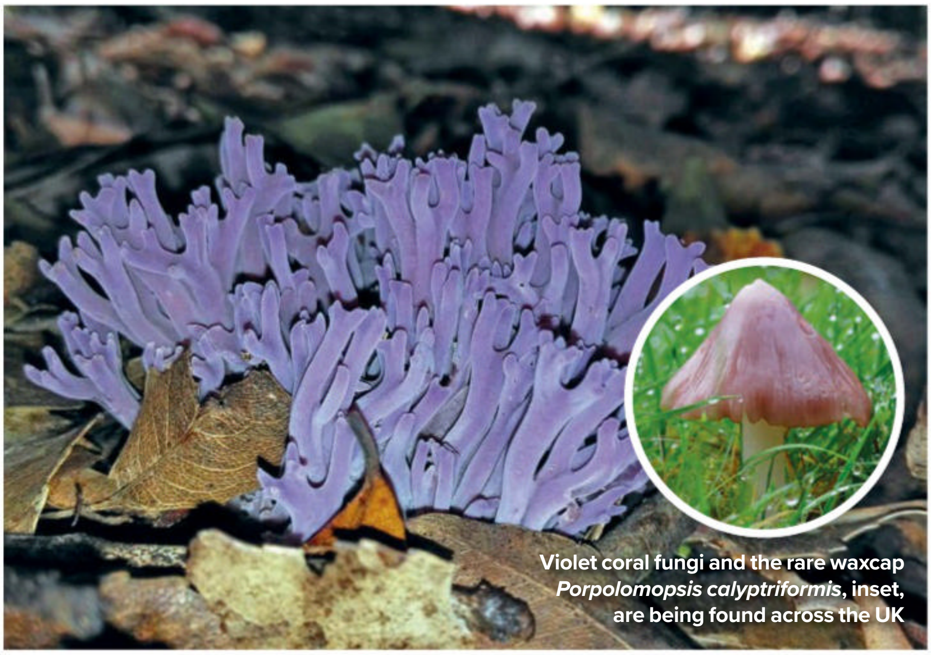
Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

Peter Burk is delighted to be celebrating the success of the UK's garden centres



Violet coral fungi and the rare waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis*, inset, are being found across the UK

© Shutterstock

Colourful rare fungi are making a comeback

Pink and purple plants are colonising new spots

Rare pink and purple fungi are starting to colonise new areas of the UK.

Clavaria zollingeri, or violet coral, has been discovered in 18 new locations during a citizen science survey carried out by the charity Plantlife.

The rarer waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis*, which is a delicate baby pink, has been seen in 300 new sites.

"They are internationally vulnerable which puts them in the same category as snow leopards and giant pandas in terms of their extinction risk. We have an international responsibility in the UK to protect these fungi," said Plantlife's Senior Fungi Conservation Officer, Dr Aileen Baird.

The survey was carried out by 850 volunteers who searched gardens, graveyards and sheep farms.

The new finds have substantially increased the fungi database held by the British Mycological Society as before there were only just over 1,000 pink waxcap and 183 violet coral sites recorded.

Both fungi are naturally found in ancient grasslands, which have been disappearing rapidly.

Waxcaps are brightly coloured with red, orange and yellow varieties. Never pick them, wash hands after touching and never eat unidentified fungi.

Garden centre organisation celebrates six decades

The Garden Centre Association celebrates its 60th anniversary next year.

The organisation was founded to help gardening become more accessible to all.

Garden centres started to appear in the 1950s and 60s when growers started pioneering the idea that plants could be sold in containers all year, and not just seasonally.

The GCA's Chief Executive, Peter Burks, said: "We've several members who have been involved with our organisation for 40 to 60 years, including some of the nation's oldest-known garden centres like Stewarts Christchurch, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year."

Gifts to help save our bumblebees

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust, which works to conserve the future of the UK's native wild bees, has launched its Christmas gift list.

It includes T-shirts and hoodies for men, women and children, as well as accessories including caps, beanie hats, bags, crockery and notebooks.

All the items are attractively designed and help to raise funds for our endangered bees.

To see the full gift range visit: bumblebee-conservationteemill.com, and to find out more about the Trust visit: bumblebee-conservation.org

Right: The Bumblebee Conservation Trust has a wide range of attractive festive gift ideas

Royal appearance on seed bank podcast

His Majesty King Charles III has joined Oscar-winning actress and keen gardener Cate Blanchett on a podcast to celebrate 25 years of the Millennium Seed Bank.

The King is patron of the Royal Botanic Gardens, while Cate is Kew's Ambassador for Wakehurst, where the seed bank is located.

The podcast, called *Unearthed, The Need for Seeds*, is His Majesty's second-ever podcast and in it he discusses the importance of the MSB and its achievements with Cate and Kew seed scientist, Dr Elinor Breman.

King Charles III said: I think it's wonderful what the seed bank is doing. I'm very proud to be a patron of Kew. It does wonderful work."

Cate Blanchett added: "Recording the podcast was an absolute joy. It was also revelatory. I witnessed the invaluable science that is undertaken around the clock by the dedicated team at Wakehurst and their partners across the world."

Above: King Charles III joined Cate Blanchett and Dr Elinor Breman to celebrate 25 years of the Millennium Seed Bank

© Chris Jackson - Getty Images for RBG Kew

Thank you for joining us.

Many of the *AG* team at last year's GMG awards, and, below, Lucy, Anne and Mike are up for awards this year

AG shortlisted for top media award

Magazine and writers get seal of approval from the Garden Media Guild

For the first time in its illustrious history, *Amateur Gardening* has been shortlisted for arguably the most prestigious award in the gardening media world. Your favourite gardening magazine is in line to take home the Gardening Publication of the Year accolade at the Garden Media Guild Awards, which takes place at The Savoy in London on November 21.

The 141-year-old publication, the oldest gardening magazine in the world, is being considered against other prestigious titles including *Gardeners' World Magazine*, *The Garden*, *Gardens Illustrated* and *The Hardy Plant*.

The nomination comes exactly two years after *AG* was on the brink of disappearing altogether after it was shut down by previous owners, before the Kelsey Publishing Group swept in to save it.

AG editor Kim Stoddart said: "I am absolutely thrilled to bits that *AG* has made it onto the Gardening Publication of the Year shortlist.

"It is a fabulous achievement to be there alongside other great magazines, and is testament to the hard work and brilliance of everyone who contributes to the magazine each fortnight."

Several current *AG* writers and former contributors are also in line to win individual awards.

Mike Palmer is shortlisted in the Practical Journalist of the Year and Gardening Columnist of the Year categories, Lucy Chamberlain and Anne Swithinbank are also nominated as Practical Journalist of the Year, while Lucy is also in with a shout for her book *Grow Food Anywhere* in The Peter Seabrook Practical Book of the Year section, and her BBC Essex Gardening Hour in the radio show section.

Our regular cookery writer and no-dig kitchen garden guru Stephanie Hafferty is also shortlisted for Practical Journalist of the Year.

Gardeners and writers who have featured on our pages and are also nominated for this year's GMG awards include Adam Alexander, Jane Peronne, Andrew Jackson, Olga Grieves, Alexandra Campbell, Rekha Mistry, Helen Cross, Adam Kirtland and Val Bourne.

AG staff are now hoping they will sweep to victory next week, following the magazine's success at last year's GMG awards where Kim Stoddart was named Practical Gardener of the Year, and Toby Buckland bagged the Columnist of the Year award.

Kim added: "When you see all those names you realise just how vital and strong *Amateur Gardening* has become.

"We are lucky to have so many brilliant writers on our team and are delighted that we have been recognised as being at the forefront of accessible, sustainable and climate-resilient gardening. It is going to be a very exciting awards event!"

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Above: **AG editor Kim was named Practical Gardener of the Year at the 2024 awards with Toby Buckland as Columnist of Year**

The new greenhouse at Benthall Hall will help its tremendous crocus display

Crocus cultivation boost

A new White Cottage greenhouse at the National Trust's Benthall Hall estate in Shropshire is helping gardeners expand their annual crocus displays.

The estate recently installed the greenhouse, a replica of a former Victorian structure, to boost cultivation of historic crocus varieties grown and named on-site by 19th century botanist George Maw.

Benthall's Gardener in Charge, Nick Swankie, said: "The new greenhouse is allowing us to deepen our crocus collection at Benthall. We will be able to display more of the varieties that George Maw collected, and that we know he specifically named at the hall."

Make your own festive wreath

Christmas wreath workshops are being held this month by Age Concern North, South and West Dorset.

The two-hour fundraising sessions take place on November 29 at 10am and 1pm, and on November 30 at 11am and 2pm.

The cost is £35 per person and includes all materials and embellishments, plus refreshments.

The workshops take place at 5 Crown Square, Poundbury, Dorchester and places can be booked by calling 01305 269444.

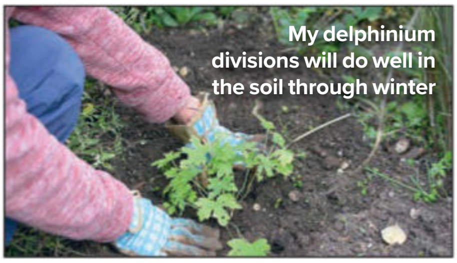
Above: **Make a wreath and help fundraise for Age Concern**

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GREAT GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with *AG*'s **Ruth Hayes**

I prefer the 'moat and mound' method of edging borders as it lasts longer, is easy to maintain and looks more defined



My delphinium divisions will do well in the soil through winter

Staying active helps brighten up those grey days

Even the smallest actions can make a difference and lift spirits

I was talking to a friend the other day and we both said that though we are 'news junkies', we'd stepped away from it of late because a lot of it seems to have a lowering effect on our spirits and peace of mind.

We agreed that matters weren't helped by the arrival of a spell of grey days when light levels slumped, taking our energies with them.

This led to a discussion about what we like to do to boost our cheerfulness. In her case it's dog walking and foraging; for me it's, of course, getting out into the garden.

While events beyond our control (including the weather) can make us feel a little helpless and ineffectual, being able to harness and create beauty and meaning in our gardens, terraces and balconies can help lift the day immensely.

Simply getting out and doing something positive and productive, even a little thing, can be all it takes to make the day so much better.

As autumn marches on, there's still lots to do in the garden, even when the day is dark and uninviting.

Recently, I spent a very satisfying morning tidying the shed, storing seeds and refurbishing, cleaning and sharpening my most-used tools and tidying them away in their proper places.

Edging lawns and mounding soil

After that I was completely fired up, so I turned my attention to the garden itself and spent a very happy hour weeding and edging the borders.

Instead of using a half-moon tool, I prefer to create a 'moat' between the lawn and the border edge and mound the soil around the plants. It creates a more defined space between grass and beds and is much easier to keep neat.

It's also an easy form of no-dig gardening because once you have weeded, you can simply layer the removed soil on the borders as a mulch, topping it up with compost or manure if you want.

Finally, I decided where to plant the delphinium divisions I made in the summer. They will fare better in the soil than in pots through winter and be ready to throw out new shoots once spring arrives.

Neat ways and saving money

1 Loop and hang electric cables somewhere dry for winter. It gets them off the floor, makes them accessible and stops them getting tangled.

2 Canes aren't wildly expensive but it pays to look after them, so clean the ends and let them dry properly before storing them for winter.

3 I regularly give washable gardening gloves a quick clean. It keeps them flexible and more comfortable to wear and extends their lifespan.

4 There is already too much plastic on the planet and there's no need to buy more labels if you wipe down pre-used ones with white spirit or vinegar and wash them afterwards.

All images unless otherwise credited © Ruth Hayes

Check young and newly planted trees are securely staked Inset: **Mulch newly planted trees with organic matter or use a mulch mat to lessen moisture loss**

Caring for and moving trees and shrubs

Make sure trees and shrubs can withstand winter weather

Newly planted trees and shrubs are some of the most vulnerable plants in our gardens and as we are in prime bare-root planting (and tree moving) season, we must give them as much support as possible.

There are various ways of staking, either with a single angled or vertical piece of wood, or two shorter pieces joined by a crosspiece.

I live at the top of a hill so our trees are well staked and tied using an upright support and broad figure-of-eight rubber tie to prevent the stake from rubbing against the tree bark. So far, we haven't lost any…

Sometimes we need to relocate trees and shrubs. Autumn and winter are the best times to move deciduous trees, while October and March, when the soil is summer-warm or just warming up, is best for evergreens.

Leave alone anything that has been in the soil for longer than a few years as it is less likely to survive the upheaval.

If you are organised, start preparations a year in advance by digging a 30cm (1ft) trench around the tree, and filling it with sand to promote the growth of fibrous feeder roots. I have never done this, however, and have always managed to move young trees successfully.

Choose a day that is forecast to be overcast and without too much wind, and water the tree/shrub generously 24 hours in advance.

Prepare the new planting spot by digging a hole and forking in lots of well-rotted compost or manure with added bone meal. Then dig widely around your tree (as wide as the spread of branches) until all the roots are freed.

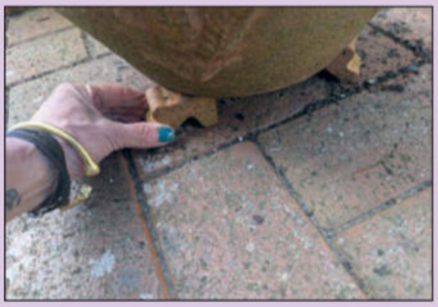
Tie any whippy branches to make it easier to transport, then carefully lift the whole plant and wrap its roots in plastic or sacking to prevent dehydration.

Replant as quickly as you can at the same depth as before and with the graft just above soil level, supporting the tree with a stake and infilling around it with soil and compost. Tread it down as you go to firm the ground and remove air pockets.

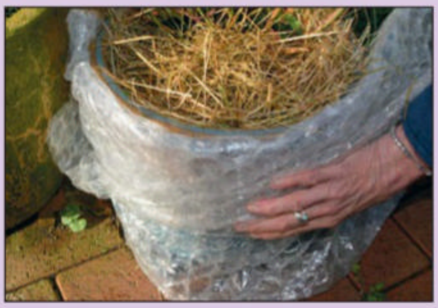
Finally, water well and mulch the root area with compost or manure (keeping it off the trunk so it doesn't soften the bark) or use a woollen mulch mat.

Keep the soil damp while the tree is settling in and check the support is doing its job, especially in spring storms.

Protecting containers in winter



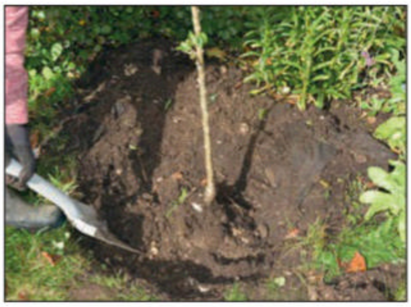
1 Waterlogging in winter is a common cause of plant failure, so raise your pots off the ground so that excess rain, thawing frost and snowmelt can escape and not drown the roots.



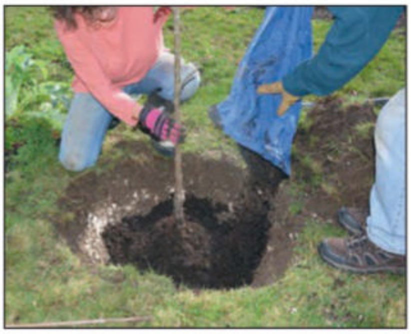
2 When compost freezes it can crack pots and kill plant roots, so mulch the container with compost or straw and wrap the pots in fleece or bubblewrap for insulation.

Tree moving tips

Giving your tree its best chance



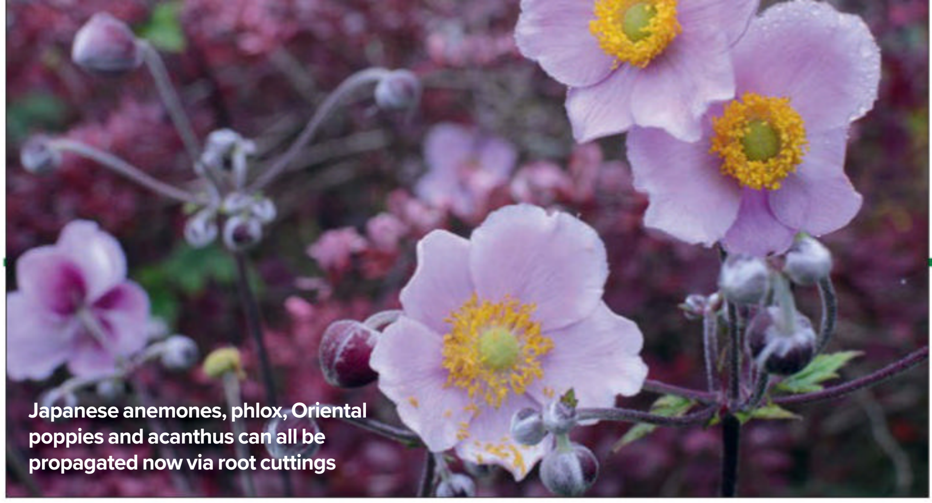
1 Dig around the tree as wide as its branches extend to minimise the risk to the roots when you lift it.



2 Plant at the same depth as before (note the soil mark) and with the knobbly graft just above soil level.

3 Infill with compost and manure, treading it down to firm the roots and knock out air pockets.

4 Water generously, a couple of watering cans at least, and don't let the soil dry out for a year after planting.



Japanese anemones, phlox, Oriental poppies and acanthus can all be propagated now via root cuttings

Using roots to make plants for free

Taking subterranean cuttings is an easy form of propagation

Carefully lift your plant and replant immediately after removing some root material

We usually use the top growth of plants when we take cuttings, but in winter it pays to dig beneath the surface for an even easier form of propagation.

I like to take root cuttings at this time of year before the soil gets too cold and wet in the deeper months of winter.

Because the process involves taking fragments of root from plants, if there is still some warmth left in the soil they will bed back in more easily afterwards.

Propagation from root cuttings is one of the easiest ways of boosting plant stocks of perennials such as Oriental poppies, sea holly, acanthus, phlox and Japanese anemones that spread via new suckers emerging from their roots.

The established plants are dug up while dormant, a small amount of root material is removed, and then the plant goes immediately back into the ground, none the worse for wear.

Root cuttings generally 'take' easily and the emerging young plants are less likely to be bothered by pests and diseases that can prey on fresh new top growth.

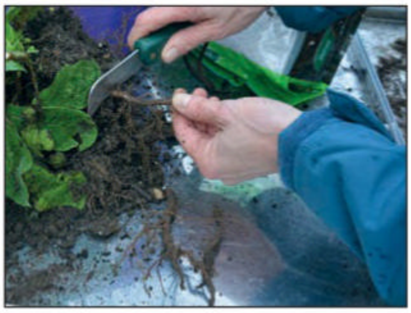
I would recommend giving the roots a quick rinse before taking the cuttings to remove soil-borne pests such as vine weevil eggs and larvae.

Fleshy roots from plants such as verbascum, Oriental poppy and acanthus are inserted vertically into your pots of gritty seed compost.

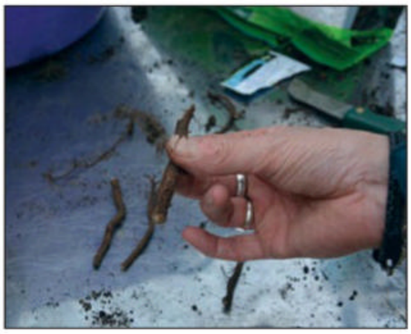
Cuttings from thinner roots, such as those found on Japanese anemones, phlox and hardy geraniums, should be between 5 to 10cm (2 to 4in) long and laid on top of the compost then topped with a fine layer of vermiculite.

Step by step

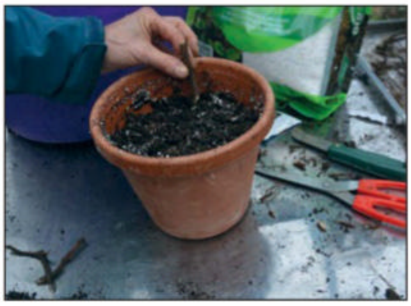
Taking subterranean cuttings



1 Remove 5 to 10cm (2 to 4in) sections of root from your plant and carefully remove the spindly side rootlets.



2 Make a horizontal cut at the top end of the root and an angled one at the bottom to create a larger surface for root growth.



3 Insert your cuttings into a pot of dampened gritty seed compost so the flat top is flush with the compost surface.

4 Place the cuttings in a cold frame or greenhouse. Keep the compost damp but not soggy and new shoots should appear next spring.

Looking after chilli plants in winter

1 It's been a great year for chillies and I've brought our 'Prairie Fire' plants indoors to brighten the house. They're on warm, light windowsills and I'm feeding them a little diluted seaweed fertiliser and hoping they will last through winter.

2 I've given the larger chilli plants ('Big Sun' and 'Paper Lantern Habanero') the same treatment but have given their branches a trim so they won't need so much energy but will quietly tick over until the spring, when I'll re-pot them.

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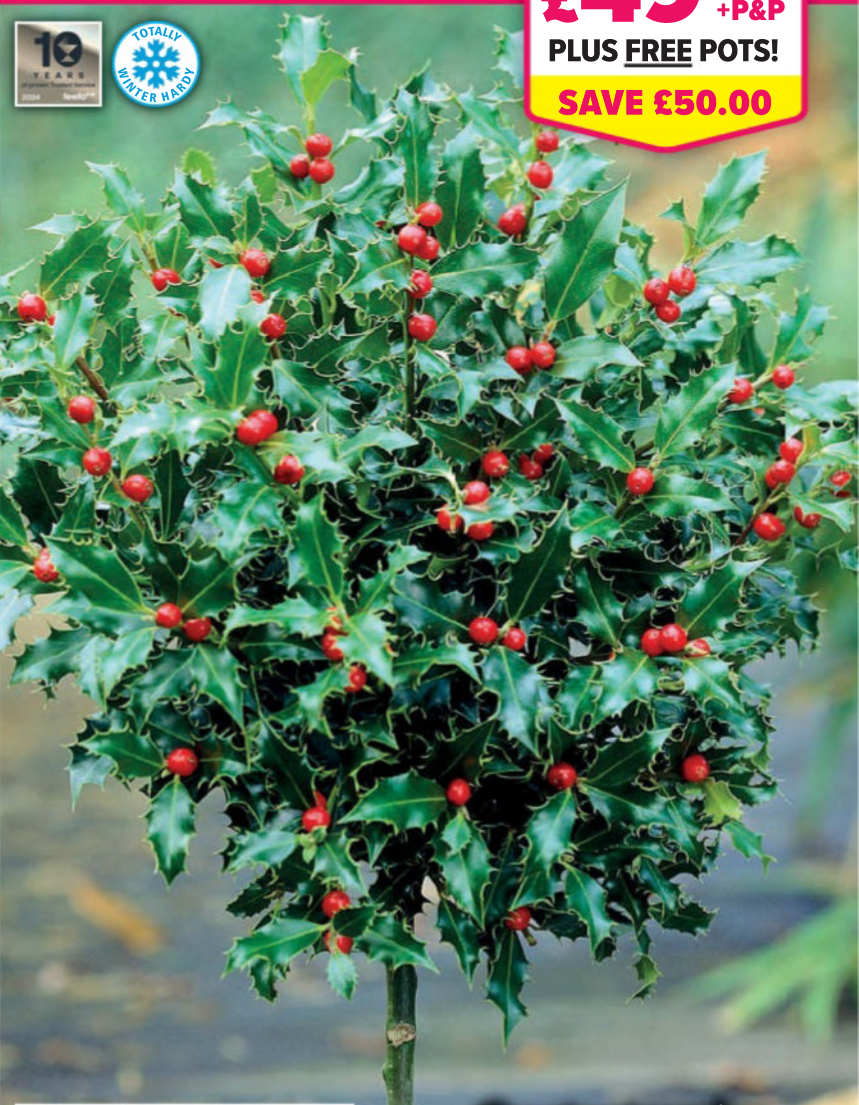

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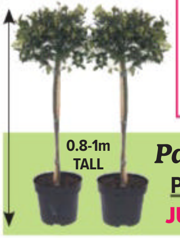

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Your VEG GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**

Preventing replant disease, safeguarding exotic crops this winter, and taking hardwood cuttings

Lucy covers some of the most important jobs of the fortnight ahead

As a species, humans are very adept at exploiting plants for our own gain (in this case, food) – and one plant family in particular has served us very well. The rose family (*Rosaceae*) contains the vast majority of fruits that we eat: apples, pears, quinces, medlars, plums, cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots, almonds, raspberries, blackberries and strawberries – to name the main ones. When, as gardeners, we want to remove one of these crops from our plot because it's unproductive, dead or diseased – this is where this exploitation can come back to bite us, in the form of replant disease.

My summer raspberry row died totally this year – it's 10 years old, so well established, and I'm presuming this summer's drought was to blame. I love raspberries (my autumn varieties are fine by the way) so I will replant the summer canes this winter, but I can't just go ahead straightaway.

If I try to replant anything from the rose family into that bed, the soil will have built up fungi and nematodes from the previous crop that in themselves aren't damaging, but collectively will likely harm the new raspberry canes. So, how can I overcome this 'replant disease'? Here are my plans:

I have bare soil on my summer salad bed that hasn't had rose family members growing in it, so I'm going to dig out the earth from the raspberry row and replace it with soil from the salad bed. I'm also going to inoculate the new raspberry cane roots with beneficial fungi called mycorrhizal fungi (you can buy these in packet form, such as Empathy Rootgrow). The fungi, in essence, boost the root system of the new canes, improving their nutrient and water uptake and drought tolerance. This fast-tracked vigour helps to thwart any counterproductive soil life. Finally, I'll lay down a thick mulch of organic matter, around 5 to 7cm (2 to 3in) deep to defend my canes against future droughts.

Lucy explains how she is planning to plant a new summer raspberry row to avoid replant disease

Safeguard less hardy edibles

✿ We're experimenting these days with more exotic crops in a drive to reflect our ever-expanding knowledge of world foods and explore what our changing climate can accommodate. So I, like many of you, am growing potted citruses, pineapple guavas, gingers, bananas, loquats and other less traditional UK plants.

We're well versed in how to overwinter tender crops (my citrus, ginger and banana sit in my porch until April) but what about those crops that are 'borderline hardy'? My pineapple guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*) and Japanese loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*) will survive outside unprotected in a mild winter, but if we have another 'Beast from the East' (I live in East Anglia) they'll be killed.

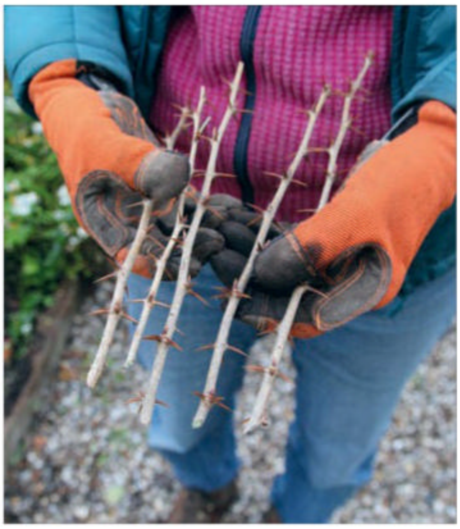
So, to safeguard against that, I move them to a sheltered, sunny corner of my plot and raise them up on pot 'feet' to prevent waterlogging (borderline plants hate soggy cold roots, so I won't water them, either). Fingers crossed this is enough, but if a 'beast' comes along, I'll probably move them into the greenhouse!

Find out how to overwinter more exotic edibles such as pineapple guava (*Feijoa sellowiana*) with Lucy's expert help

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Step by step How to take hardwood cuttings of fruit

I am a big fan of hardwood cuttings – they save you money and are easy to take. It also helps you keep your plot productive as your plants get old. Use them for currants, figs, grapes, mulberries and gooseberries. My gooseberries are now getting a bit long in the tooth, so to secure crops in the future I'm taking a few hardwood cuttings – here's how:



1 Firstly, and most importantly, only propagate from good plants. By that, I mean those that produce fruits that taste pleasant and have leaves/buds/fruit that aren't distorted, twisted or otherwise disfigured (this can indicate virus infection, which can't be cured). Choose woody stems that were produced this season, rather than older wood.

2 Cut lengths of stem 20 to 30cm (8 to 12in) long, making a flat cut at the bottom and a slanting cut (ideally, just above a strong bud) at the top. This stops you muddling up which is the top, and which is the bottom, of your cuttings. Insert the cuttings to just below their uppermost bud, into a weed-free bed of soil, or a deep pot of peat-free compost (rose pots are ideal.)

3 Water the soil or compost well, then leave the cuttings to root (potted cuttings can be moved into a cold frame or sheltered spot of the garden for a little protection). There should be signs of leaf growth come the spring – allow the plants to develop into autumn, then carefully dig them up or knock them out of their pot, and replant or give away.

Safely pack away mesh and netting

Top tip

✿ Our move away from using chemicals is fantastic – and in doing so I rely more heavily on barriers such as insect-proof mesh (for carrot root fly, for example) and bird netting over fruit cages.

Now that temperatures are falling for winter, these insects are becoming dormant and our fruit is safely preserved or stored, so, pack away your barriers to maintain their useful lifespan. If you've ever experienced tangled netting you'll know how frustrating it is to untangle it – I find that rolling mine onto a sturdy pole makes for easy, tangle-free and space-efficient storage. I was once taught by a senior and very experienced gardener how to weave your mesh and/or netting so that it didn't tangle up at all. Annoyingly I can't remember how to do that now but I do recall that it actually looked quite beautiful!

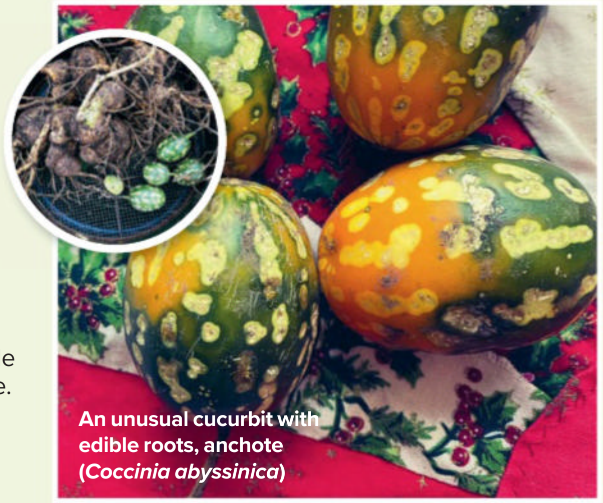
Right: Lucy explains how to pack away netting for use next year

Your VEG GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with Lucy Chamberlain

Why not try...?

Anchote



An unusual cucurbit with edible roots, anchote (*Coccinia abyssinica*)

Image © Brown Envelope Seeds

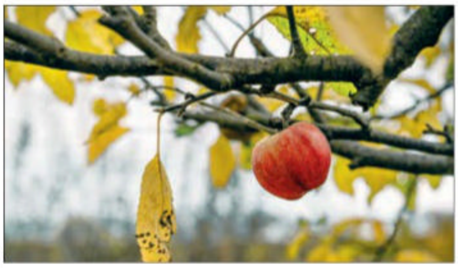
✿ I love an unusual cucurbit as much as the next person, so let me welcome anchote to the gang (*Coccinia abyssinica*). This member of the pumpkin family is definitely quirky in that it's the tuberous roots you eat, rather than the fruits (the fruits, while very attractive, taste bitter).

You can start anchotes off via seeds or tubers. The tubers look like a cross between a dahlia and a sweet potato, and they can be planted in April into a large tub or border in a sunny spot outdoors, or into a glasshouse or polytunnel bed (the plant grows very large so give it ample room to climb). Seeds can be sown, again in April, just like a pumpkin (i.e. use a good-sized pot of multipurpose compost, and sow in warmth).

Allow plants to scramble up sturdy supports, then harvest the tubers (boil and eat like a potato) in November, before the first frosts.

Available to buy at www.brownenvelopeseeds.ie

5 quick jobs...



1 If you own late-season apples like 'Suntan', 'Pixie', 'Tydeman's Late Orange' or 'D'Arcy Spice', leave them on the tree until just before the first frosts are due, then pick and store them in a shed or garage (rodent-free) in cardboard boxes or trays. This allows their flavours to mellow and sweeten, as often they're sour when picked.

2 Hopefully your maincrop potatoes will now be in storage (if not, lift them fast otherwise slugs will take notches out of the tubers). Get into the habit of checking these stores regularly, as one rotted spud can quickly infect another. The easiest way to maintain quality is to use your nose – rotted potatoes give off a real pong!

3 This is the ideal month to plant a grapevine or two (or more, if you fancy a vineyard). Outdoor vines are best planted in a sunny spot on free-draining soil. If you'd like to gain high-quality eating grapes, greenhouse growing is best. Ideally, plant the vine outside, then train it into the greenhouse through a small hole in the glass.

4 Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) is a beautiful herb – there are two types: French and Russian, with the Russian form being more vigorous but milder in flavour. Despite being reasonably hardy in much of the UK, they dislike winter waterlogging, so lay potted plants on their sides or cover soil-grown clumps with a chipped bark.

5 Now is a time for winter brassicas to come into their own. You may find that autumn/winter cauliflowers like 'Moby Dick' are already producing curds, and that kale plants are now bulked up sufficiently for sizable harvests. Don't forget, either, to take out the main rosette of Brussels sprout plants – these 'tops' taste delicious.

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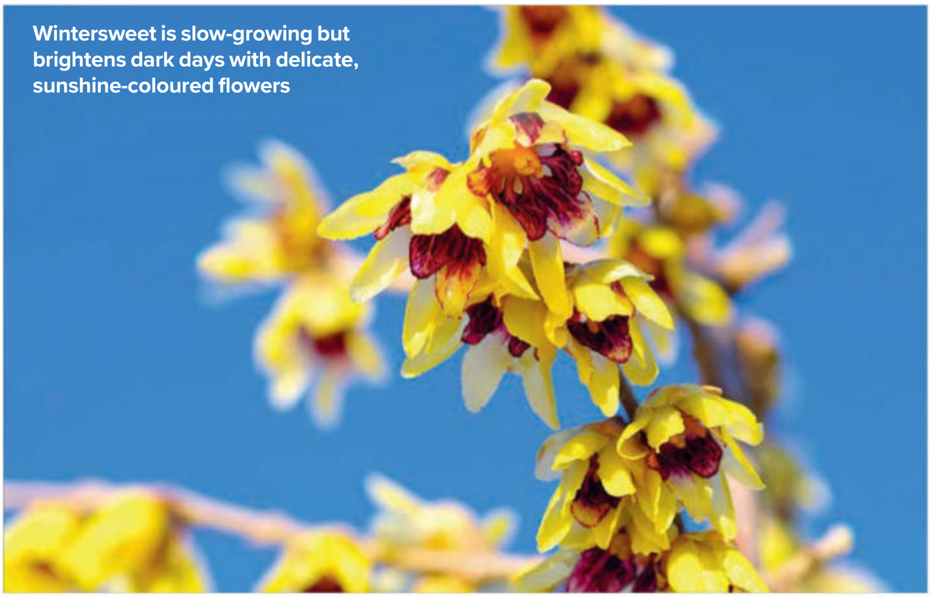
Small space | Big ideas

With **Chris Collins**, Garden Organic's Head of Horticulture



Wintersweet is slow-growing but brightens dark days with delicate, sunshine-coloured flowers

3 of the best scented shrubs for kitchen door containers

Chris Collins from Garden Organic suggests plants to bring perfume to your doorstep this winter

While spring and summer are all about the visual power of plants, winter is the time for quieter, more fragrant plants to show off their talents. Winter-flowering shrubs can bring texture and intensely scented blooms, and many varieties are happy growing in containers. Better still, they'll bring early pollinators to fill your garden with life and the promise of spring to come.

Sweet box can handle shade and dry soil and its flowers have the sweetest scent

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Placed near your kitchen door or garden path, my favourite varieties create a burst of fragrance as you brush past.

Wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*)

This Asian evergreen delights with its waxy yellow flowers that appear on bare stems over the colder months. It likes a warm, sheltered location, so next to a wall is ideal. Be patient as it can take a few years before this shrub is happy to flower.

Sweet box (*Sarcococca confusa*)

This low-growing evergreen is super versatile with glossy leaves. And while the tiny white flowers might be blink-and-you'll-miss-them in appearance, they're winners for fragrance. I think they smell like vanilla ice cream. This plant is also a good one for a shady area as it will tolerate dry soil and less sun.

Daphne is grown for its delicious winter perfume

Daphne spp

Daphnes can be evergreen or deciduous with flowers in white, pink or red, and the scent will hit you as soon as you enter the garden. This plant likes shade too, but will need moist, slightly alkaline soil. It doesn't like the wind so make sure it's planted in a sheltered spot.

For more advice on organic gardening head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to become a member and support the charity.

Chris's Q&As

Q How do I plant a shrub for optimum success?

A I like to soak the rootball first, then dig a hole at least twice the size of the container they've come in. Make sure the top of the rootball is level with the soil surface (often you can see a mark on the stem). Firm in and water well. A mulch of well-rotted compost in the planting hole or around the base of the plant can get them off to a good start.

Q What's the best compost for a container shrub?

A They like most well-drained soils, so I would use good quality, peat-free compost that's designed for mature plants, or those in containers, as these will be long-lasting, nutrient-rich blends. Mix in some coarse sand or grit to help with drainage and apply comfrey pellets during the growing season, March to September.

Q What insects will be attracted to my flowering shrubs?

A We often forget that bees such as queen bumblebees and honeybees can be on the wing between November and February, especially in mild years. Providing them with late and early nectar sources is crucial for their survival. Make a banquet beneath your shrubs by adding crocus, hellebores and aconites.

3 ideas for guilt-free gardening

Editor **Kim Stoddart** explains how she has evolved her resilient approach over the years to find a balance for both garden and gardener

Getting truly connected with your outdoor space allows you to reap many benefits year-round. Rather than doing what you feel you have to do because that's what the gardening calendar or other people tell you, it's much better to look, listen and learn from your patch of the great outdoors, and balance this with the time you have to garden. Everyone's garden is different, with varying locations, heights and with differing soils, geologies and microclimates. Then there's the change in seasonality and weather patterns to add to the heady mix, which means that an exacting one-size-fits-all approach can lead to variable results, disappointment and even, sometimes, a sense of disempowerment.

Of course, rules and following instructions may provide you with some comfort, but know that not doing so can massively help too. Taking inspiration and making it your own can do wonders, especially when you garden in line with the natural world. We all make mistakes, and not everything grows exactly as we'd like it to, but rather than feeling guilty, it's an opportunity to truly learn and tailor your practices to your plot. Experimentation is part of the fun and part of the journey to empowerment and greater enjoyment which, as careful custodians of our individual gardens, allotments and patios, we truly deserve.

Kim's no-dig gardens are nurtured from the soil up with compost and mulching. She doesn't often use added fertilisers for plants in the ground

Amateur Gardening
THREE PACKETS OF SEEDS
84 WAYS TO CARRY ON GARDENING

Above: **A second flush of roses blooming in October on one of Kim's radiant rose plants and a fuchsia which she has never fed**

All images unless stated © Kim Stoddart

In my own resilient-gardening adventures in the high hills of west Wales, I have broken many traditional gardening rules over the (nearly 16) years I have been here. It's how I transformed my gardens into the permaculture-led, extreme weather-protected, productive growing space that I have today. It's how I grew fruit trees when I was told I couldn't, created wildflower areas, mix-planted and nurtured weeds back in 2013 when that wasn't the trend. I 'listened' to the garden (not literally, don't worry!) by looking and observing what I thought the space needed in order to build resilience so I could nurture it in a biodiversity-boosting and productive way that also worked with my busy lifestyle. I wanted to garden for enjoyment, for produce-growing, for flowers, wildlife and wellbeing.

1 Not really feeding plants with fertiliser

I don't have time, or the inclination, to go around feeding plants with fertilisers, and I prefer to nurture greater results from the ground up. My focus is on healthy soil, which is well-composted and mulched, not dug (unless I need to) and which provides slow-release goodness to the plants growing within it. This is for the annuals that I'm growing, both crops and flowers, and also any container-grown plants. With perennials in the ground, I'm extremely hands-off with the feeding. I like to see how much I can get away with this and I'm often amazed with the results. I have never fed my patio roses; they are grown with companion planting and ground cover (gravel in the case of one) and

Above: **The naturally fallen leaves help feed Kim's bed of hellebores**

deadheaded to boost results, but that is it. For years I felt guilty that I hadn't fed them, that I was being a so-called 'bad' gardener, but they have thrived for 16 years because the worldwide soil web below is rich with life and able to sustain them.

The same goes for many other plants in my beds and borders. Some, such as the hellebores, are fed with leaf mould (namely the leaves that fall to the ground from the plants above them, which I leave alone). This provides both a weed-suppressing mulch and a slow-release support which replicates the forest floor, with no help from me at all. They seem to like that so I let them be. I prune when I feel it is necessary, which sometimes means not at all.

2 The potential for repair and renewal

I have a habit of leaving garden secateurs out in the rain. I don't mean to but I'm slightly short-sighted and tend to move from one task to another depending on what I feel like doing, so I often forget where I've put them. I recently uncovered a few tools which had become very rusty indeed. I'm used to cleaning and oiling secateurs and sharpening spades, but I felt these needed a little professional TLC as they were so far gone, and I wanted to further hone my skills. With this in mind, I paid to go to an all-day tool fixing workshop to see what could be done.

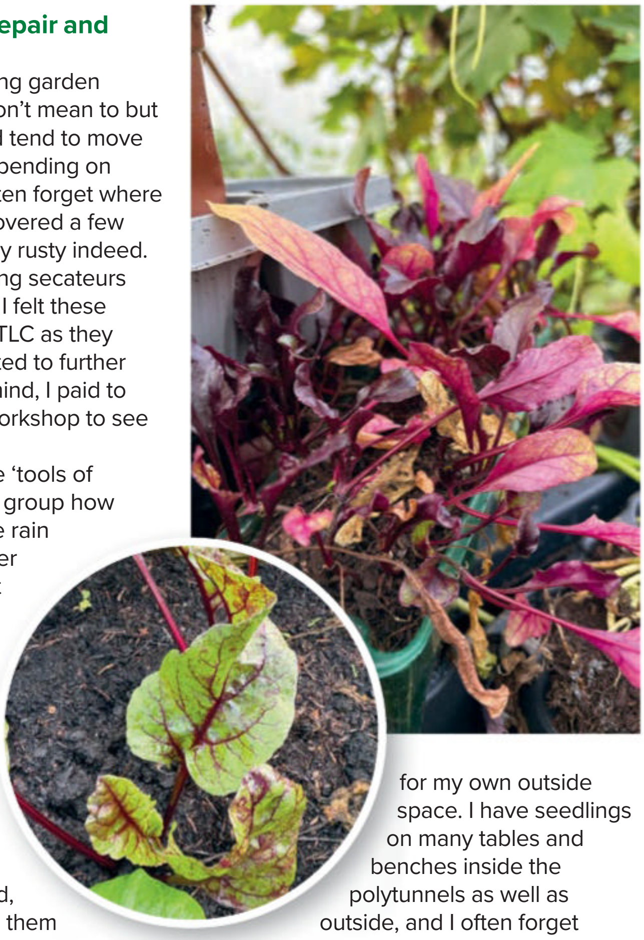
I humbly brought forth the 'tools of shame' and admitted to the group how they had been left out in the rain and woefully neglected. After some understandable slight head shaking, the course leader explained that with high quality tools (which these were), the rust is often surface level and therefore hope is not lost.

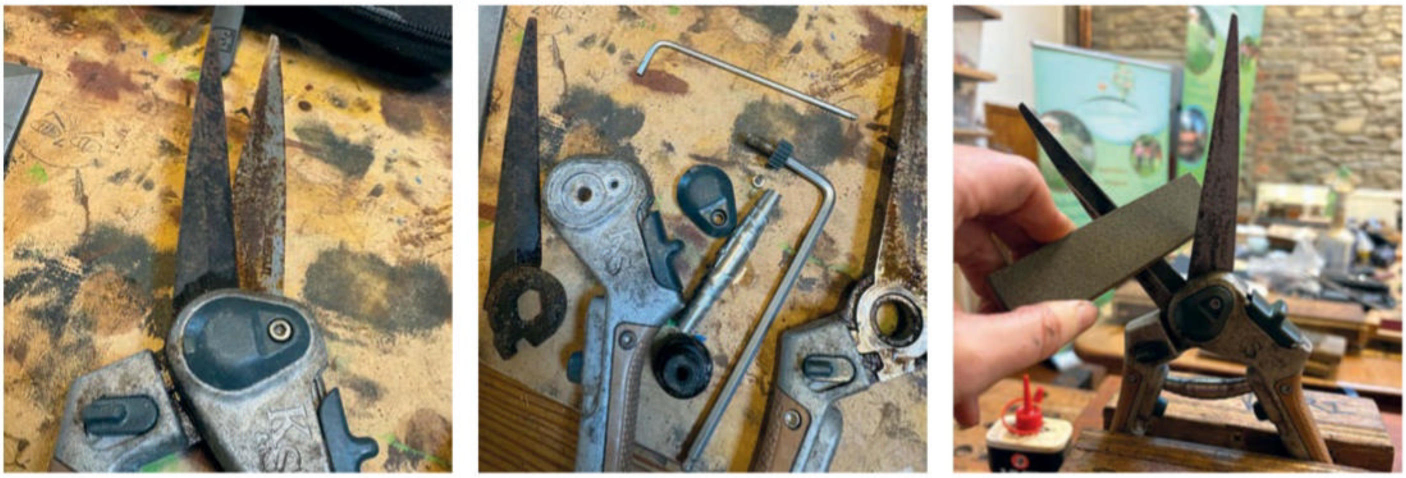
Interestingly, after hearing this, and seeing my secateurs being lovingly sanded down and sharpened, taken apart and oiled to give them a new lease of life, many of my fellow course attendees returned with very rusty, damaged tools they had hitherto possibly been too embarrassed to bring out of their cars and show to the group. To err is to be human, but to repair is often within our grasp.

3 Giving every seedling the chance to grow

I grow a lot of edibles via successional seed sowing for the community garden I manage as well as for my own outside space. I have seedlings on many tables and benches inside the polytunnels as well as outside, and I often forget about a few trays come this time of the year. What might otherwise be discarded onto the compost pile can be an opportunity for overwintered pick-and-come-again leaves in a cloche, or for windowsill growing. I always try and grow on everything I can, rather than thinning out and disposing of it, and they normally do flourish and provide harvests; it might just take them a bit longer. I see this as further making use of everything I have and it boosts the amount of available edibles both now and in the 'hungry gap' period come spring.

Compacted, forgotten or weak-looking seedlings like this tray of beetroot can often be planted on for extra undercover leaf pickings





Above: **From left, the very rusted secateurs are taken apart, sanded, sharpened and oiled, and saved**

Kim shares more undercover growing tips

FIRST TUNNELS

Undercover growing

In this new series, editor **Kim Stoddart** explains how to save money, boost results and aid wellbeing with overwinter growing

I've interviewed many gardeners over the years for many publications and was often amazed how many people don't make use of their undercover growing space during the colder months. Instead, leaving it dormant and bedding it down for winter, closing the door literally and metaphorically when this time of year is arguably the most exciting and precious period for polytunnel and greenhouse growing.

At the time of writing I am still harvesting tomatoes, aubergines and French beans from my unheated tunnels, along with colourful cosmos, sweet peas and calendula, and flavoursome lemon verbena, basil and chillies. They won't last much longer of course, but what a joy it is to be picking summer produce and the more delicate herbs so late in the season.

I'm picking off the ripened tomatoes and beans during an almost daily forage to help the plants put their energy into the remaining fruits. The aubergines have just about stopped, the basil won't last much longer, but tomatoes and beans can keep going for a few more weeks if there isn't a hard frost.

Above: The lovely tomatoes are still coming thick and fast in late October from the polytunnel

Above: Not meticulously tidying your tunnel helps better enable beneficial wildlife to also move around and aid natural pest control. Do allow airflow though by opening doors regularly during the day and remove caterpillars and any slugs causing issues.

I will soon start removing the remaining green tomatoes and bringing them inside, to be placed alongside ripened fruit or bananas to encourage them along. Chutney can be made with the rest. Lemon verbena and chilli plants can also be repotted and brought inside as houseplants.

Making room for wildlife

I like to encourage as many natural predators as I can inside my undercover spaces as they help massively with natural pest control as well as being delightful to see. Gardening in this way, with a greater degree of biodiversity, saves time and effort and boosts results. So, tidying and preparing for winter crops is fine, but go too far and you could be removing important garden allies from your tunnel. Creating a better balance is key.

The view from my protected undercover, all-weather growing area and, inset, Percy, one of my cats, enjoys this old tub chair as much as we do

As I was harvesting a few aubergines from one plant, I noticed some whitefly. It's not surprising as the plant is tired and more susceptible to attack in this way. What I then noticed with glee was that the natural predators had already moved in to help out - a ladybird, an earwig and also ants were eating the issue away. I also have a lot of lacewings, spiders and ground beetles in my tunnels and the latter love little piles of stones and wilder corners in which to shelter.

Think about what you do on the veg patch to encourage wildlife and try to replicate that a little in your undercover environment as well. Although your space is covered with plastic or glass, you want it to be alive and kicking and rich with natural balance so that everything benefits.

Making space for you

Your undercover space with lots of lovely winter edibles growing away (loose leaf lettuce, Chinese greens, pea shoots, Chinese radish, baby carrots, Swiss chard and kales, parsley and coriander and so forth) will continue to be productive. As well as providing an opportunity for gardening no matter the weather, it's also a lovely space to sit and enjoy over the winter months with a nice cuppa, so consider some form of seating area. It doesn't have to be new or fancy, some old chairs can work just fine. I bring benches from the garden into the tunnels and have a few old tub chairs that are incredibly comfy. Use this space to take time out over winter and nurture yourself as much as your lovely undercover edibles.

All images © Kim Stoddart

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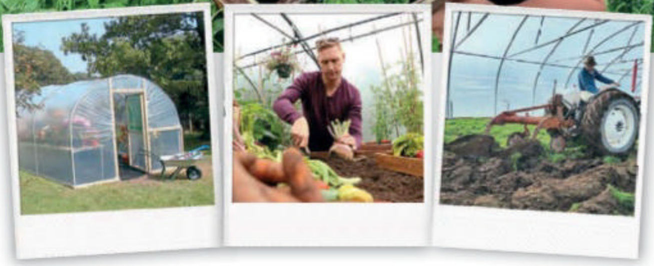

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It's hard to imagine a garden without roses, and autumn is the perfect time to increase your collection with bare-root plants

How to plant and grow bare-root roses

Mandy Bradshaw meets rose expert Keith Jones and shares his top care tips and favourite 14 rose varieties

All images unless otherwise credited: Shutterstock

It's hard to imagine a summer without roses. Nestled among other perennials in a mixed border or scrambling over pergolas and arches, they fill our gardens with scent and colour. Yet while summer is their season to shine, now is the best time to plant.

Before the advent of containers, planting bare-root roses was commonplace and it's still widely acknowledged to be the easiest – and cheapest – way to add them to your garden.

"The rose is dormant so the root can make some growth before the plant has to grow," explains rose expert Keith Jones of family firm C&K Jones, which started in 1979.

"You water it in to get it started and thereafter if we have a dry spell. Then, when you come to February or March, the plant wants to grow."

Not having to pay for the pot, compost and a nursery's time looking after the plant means bare root roses are also cheaper to buy than container-grown plants.

Keith raises around 300 to 400 different varieties at his nursery in Chester, which he runs with his wife, Rachael. Each rose is individually grafted and trimmed – a process that takes up to two years to produce a rose ready for sale. Any potted plants are grown peat-free.

Over the years, the nursery has introduced many new varieties, acting as agents for breeders around the world. One of their latest introductions is the 2025 Rose of the Year You're My Everything ('WEKsecunk').

For Keith, roses are the ultimate garden plant: hardy, long-lasting and with a wide range of colours, flower shapes and growing habits.

"They are so reliable and live for so long," he says. "There is a rose for almost every situation."

Roses UK Rose of the Year 2025 You're My Everything ('WEKsecunk').

Keith and Rachael Jones of family firm C&K roses and their rose nursery

© Keith and Rachael Jones

When to Buy

Buy bare-root from November to March and avoid planting when the ground is waterlogged, extremely dry or frozen. Plant immediately as soon as you can after delivery. If that can't be done, heel in plants (see Anne Swithinbank's article on page 28) until you can plant properly. Dig a hole and loosely cover the roots.

Above: Plant roses where you can make the moist of their beauty and scent

Where to plant

To get the best out of your rose, plant it in an open, sunny spot.

"The more sunshine the better," says Keith. "It will encourage the plant to produce energy and flowers."

While some varieties will cope with a little shade, you are more likely to get lots of leaves and few flowers. Instead, aim for at least four hours of sun a day.

Roses like a fertile soil such as a good loam or clay that drains in winter. The pH is also important and Keith advises testing the ground before planting. The ideal is neutral to slightly acid – around 7 to 5.5. If the ground is too alkaline, add some sulphur chips. If it's too acid, a handful of garden lime will sort it out.

"Add it after you've planted and it will wash down into the soil as you water."

How to plant

Unless you're lucky enough to have top quality soil, working some good compost into the planting area is beneficial.

The hole should be around 46cm (18in) deep and the roots should be spread out. Most roses are grown on rootstock to encourage strong growth and the union point – where the shoots come out of the rootstock – should be level with or just below the soil. Keith advises not planting any deeper as it will encourage the rose to produce its own roots. "It negates the point of having a rootstock."

Backfill and firm the ground gently with your heel. Water and keep well-watered during the first year until the rose is established.

Container Growing

Roses will grow in containers although they are usually happier in open ground. Choose a pot that is at least 46cm (18in) deep and the same width. If the rose becomes pot-bound, tip it out when it's dormant, trim the roots and replant. Smaller varieties, such as dwarf floribundas and patio roses, will do best.

Pest and Diseases

Aphids are one of the most common problems. The best approach is to encourage predators, including birds,

© yougarden.com

Above: Bare-root roses are a cost effective way to build your rose collection

Above: To get the best from your roses, plant them where they will get at least four hours of sun daily

Above: As a general rule, roses fare better in the ground than containers, though dwarf and patio varieties can be grown in pots

lacewings and ladybirds, into your garden. A blast of water from a powerful hose will wash aphids off or you can rub them off. Alternatively, there are organic sprays available.

Black spot and downy mildew are fungal diseases that produce dark spots on leaves. Keith believes growing healthy roses makes them better able to fight off infection.

“If the plant’s weak from not growing very well, it’s going to get disease,” he observes. “Get the ground right and you give the plant a chance to protect itself.”

The key, he says, is checking the pH and keeping the roses fed properly. He also suggests using Uncle Tom’s Rose Tonic to combat both black spot and downy mildew.

To avoid the infection spreading, gather up any fallen leaves and do not compost them as they can carry the fungal spores.

Pruning

Annual pruning is important as it encourages new, healthy growth. How you prune depends on what type of rose you have. With them all, remove any dead, weak or crossing growth and, if you can, prune to an outward facing bud.

Bush roses should be cut back by half in November to prevent wind rock over winter. They are then cut down in February to between 10 and 20cm (4 to 8in) above the union. You’re aiming for four or five stout stems of up to 20cm (8in) long.

Repeat-flowering shrub roses can be reduced in November if needed and should then be pruned in early spring or late winter to about 25 to 30cm (10 to 12in) in height.

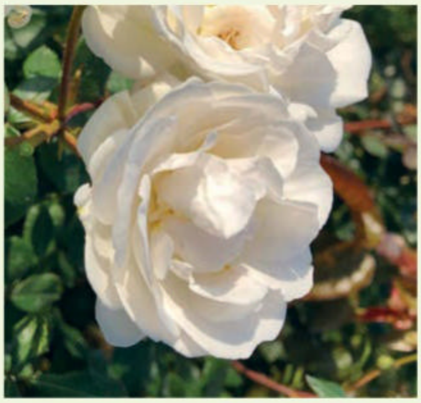
With climbing roses, leave the main framework of shoots whether they are trained over an arch or pergola, or espaliered along a wall. Cut the side shoots back to about 10 or 12cm (4 to 5in) in February. The main shoot can be shortened if needed.

Most ramblers flower only once and they should be pruned in summer after flowering as they produce buds on wood that has grown the previous season. Prune them too late and you will have fewer if any flowers.

More information on C&K Jones at *www.jonestherose.co.uk*

Keith’s top 14 rose picks

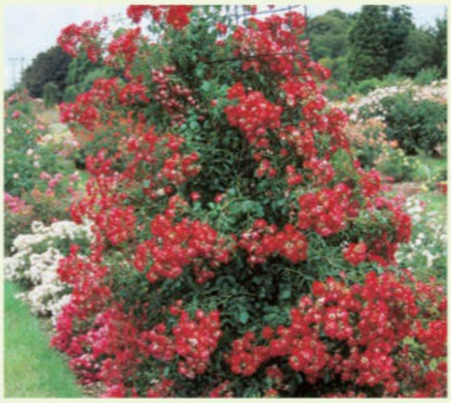
Perfume Dreams (‘VISSechdam’)



© Roses UK

An extremely healthy climber of 1.8 to 2.4m (6 to 7.8ft) with creamy white double flowers and a strong scent.

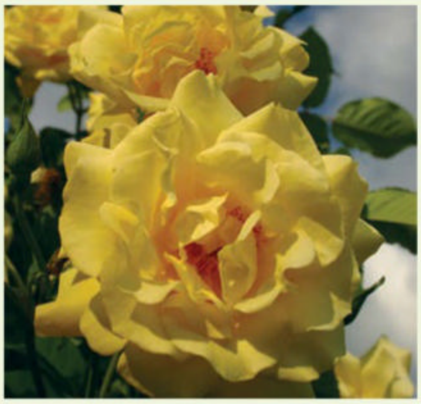
Rambling Rosie (‘Horjasper’)



© Roses UK

A rambler that repeats with clusters of crimson red flowers. Not as big as many, it will make 2.4 to 3m (7.8 to 10ft).

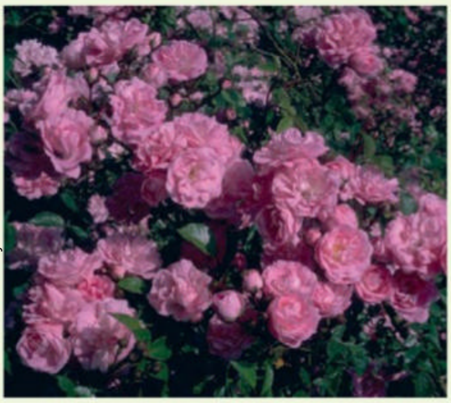
Golden Gate (‘Korgolgat’)



© Roses UK

Single yellow flowers on a climber that reaches 2.4 to 3m (7.8 to 10ft). Healthy and will flower June to November.

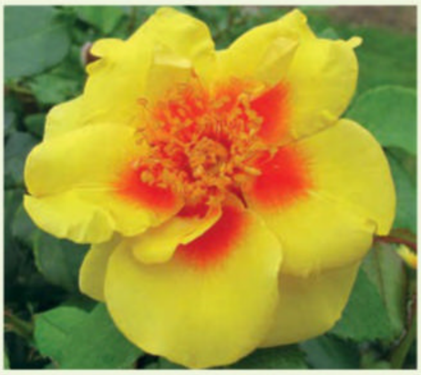
Super Fairy (‘Helsufair’)



© Blue Diamond Fryer’s Roses

A small rambler that makes 3 to 3.6m (10 to 11.8ft) with small, soft pink flowers.

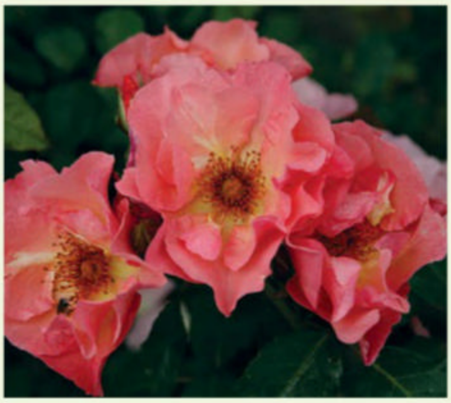
Peter’s Persica (‘Chewgoldeye’)



© Roses UK

Named for the late *AG* contributor and plantsman Peter Seabrook, this has yellow flowers with a red eye. A climber, it makes 1.8 to 2.4m (6 to 7.8ft).

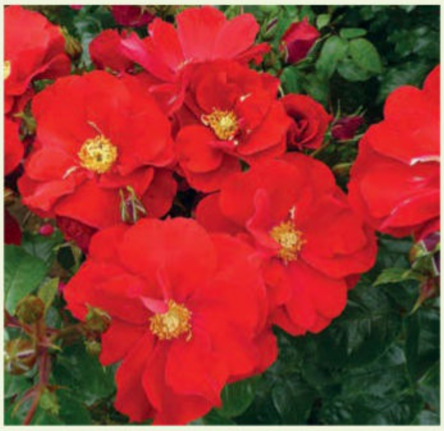
Summer Wine (‘Korizont’)



© Roses UK

A good variety for covering a large expanse, this vigorous climber has pink flowers with a yellow centre.

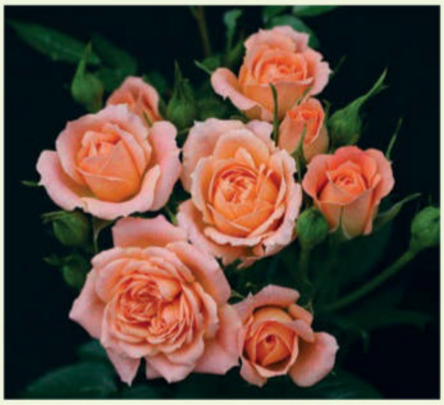
WB Yeats ('Dicoodles')



© Roses UK

Bright red flowers with a light scent. Good for containers.

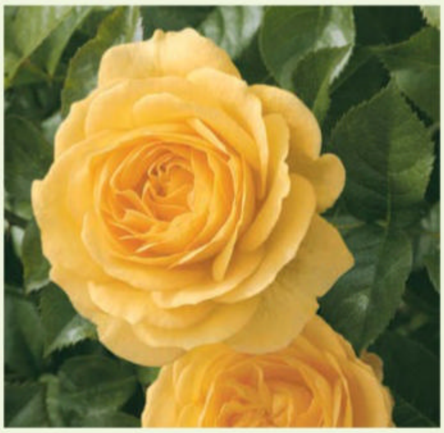
Sweet Dream ('Fryminicot')



© Roses UK

A dainty patio rose with apricot-coloured double flowers. Good for containers.

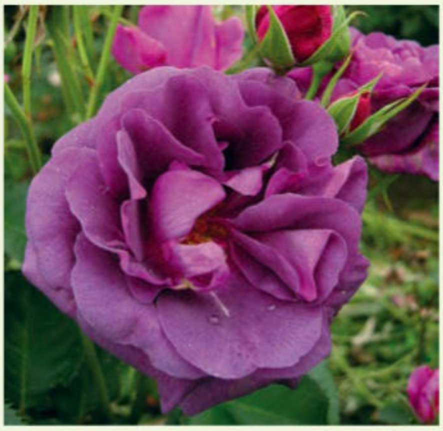
Absolutely Fabulous ('Wekvossutono')



© Roses UK

Lives up to its name with gold blooms maturing to butter yellow and a great scent on healthy plants.

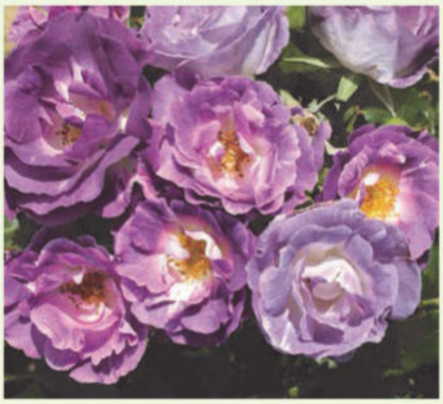
Minerva ('Visancar')



© Roses UK

Something a bit different with purple-lilac flowers and one of the best scents.

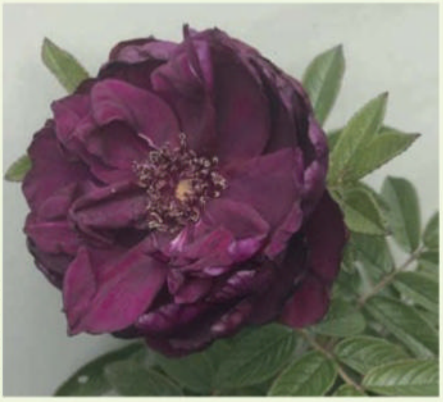
Blue for You ('Pejamblu')



© Roses UK

Clusters of mauve flowers that age to lilac-pink. A sweet perfume and healthy growth.

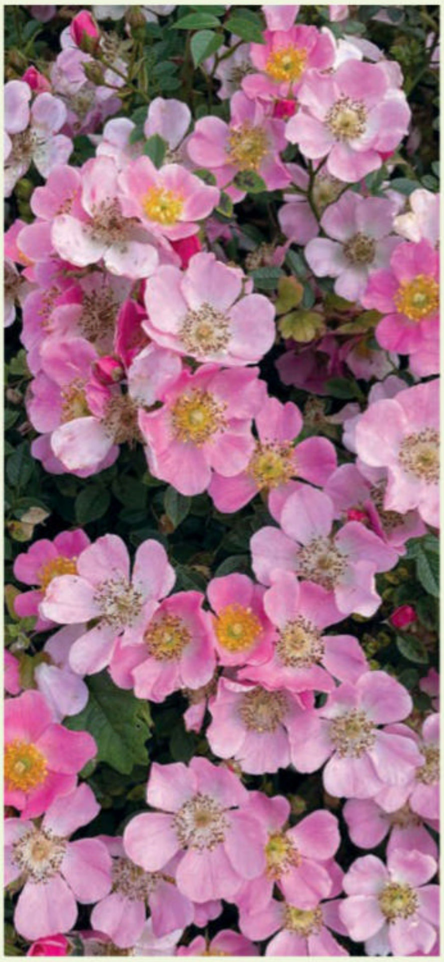
'Red Phenomenon'



© Jonestherose

Burgundy-purple flowers with a good scent and large hips in autumn set this rugosa rose apart. Ideal for hedges.

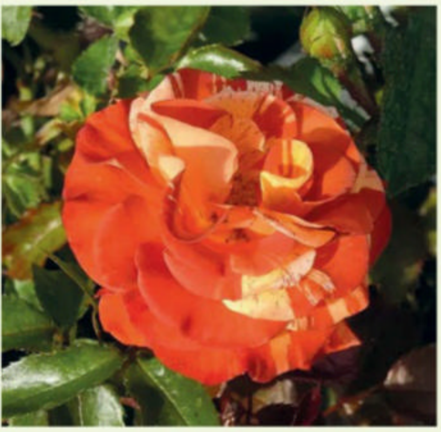
Centre Stage ('Chewcreepy')



© Roses UK

Grows to only 20cm (8in) high so good for ground cover. Clusters of pink flowers.

Oranges and Lemons ('Macoranlem')

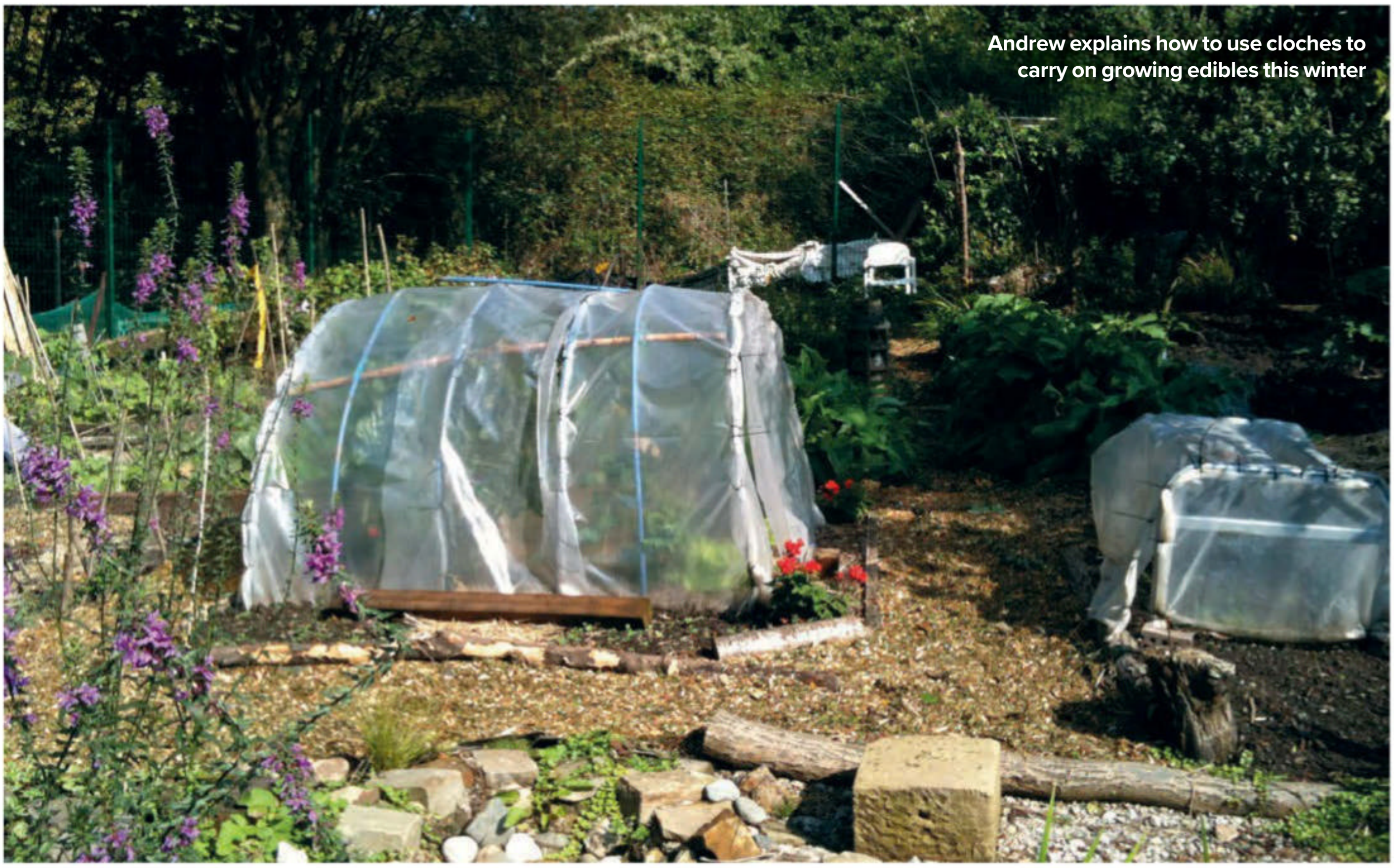


© Ashridge

Stripes or blotches of orange and lemon with a light scent.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENT (ish) GARDENER

with **Andrew Oldham**



Andrew explains how to use cloches to carry on growing edibles this winter

How to use cloches and fleece in the garden

Andrew Oldham suggests easy ways of keeping plants snug as the temperature drops

All images unless otherwise credited: Andrew Oldham

I've always associated cloches with Victorian walled gardens. For me, they were wrought iron structures that cost a fortune, while the modern ones I saw did not live up to the romance of yesteryear.

Cloches are great for starting off crops in early spring and protecting them in winter. They don't have to be fancy, and in the past I have used old window frames to protect my winter lettuce and leaves. A cloche can even be a fizzy pop bottle, its bottom cut away and the screw top opened on warm winter days and closed when the temperatures plummet.

Cloches maintain a level of warmth for the plant but also provide security against marauding pigeons. They are not a closed environment, but are a line of defence against first frosts that can catch gardeners out. Like a greenhouse, they should be open during the day, mainly, and closed at night. I have always closed my cloches with some fleece, up to an hour before the winter sun sets to keep the warmth inside. In winter I have grown radishes, lettuces, spring onions and the odd escaped viola beneath this thrifty protective barrier.

Cloches come with all the benefits of a greenhouse in miniature, but for those with little time, horticultural fleece may be better because it allows plants to breathe and reduces the risk of condensation or mildew. Also, removing it on warm winter days lets plants benefit from a hit of sunshine. I tend to place fleece over crops like winter onions and the occasional brassica.

A simple tunnel of hoops made of old hazel cuttings (though metal or plastic ones are available) lets me drape the fleece across, pinning it down on one side and at both ends but weighing one side down with bricks for ease of pulling back. Fleece will raise the temperature by a few degrees and trap warmth.

Net curtains act like fleece

Fleece can also be used on several more sensitive ferns, like *Dicksonia antarctica*, which can suffer during freezing weather. There was a time when ferns were wrapped in bubble wrap as well, but there are many who argue that the bubble wrap is unsustainable and prone to causing rot in the trunk. I agree, and have seen

Fleece can also be used on a simple structure to protect plants

> “Old net curtains and even newspaper can act as a barrier against the cold on dry, frosty nights”

alternatives to this including wigwams around ferns stuffed with straw and then wrapped in fleece.

Whatever your choice, this protective layer works wonders on delicate plants and the gardener should always have some to hand. However, if you are caught short of fleece, old net curtains and even newspaper can act as a barrier on dry, frosty nights. In the end, however, in the worst of winters that howl, freeze and flood, plants will not always be saved by a cloche or roll of the good stuff.

Above: Old net curtains can be used as insulation

Andrew’s chickens ‘helping out’ on the just-mulched rhubarb bed

Jobs for the fortnight

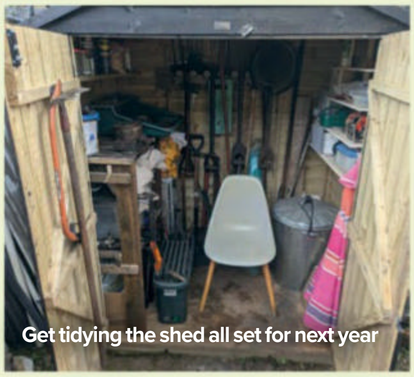
1. Prune fruit trees, such as apples and pears, to control their size and increase productivity. Winter pruning encourages new growth in the spring, so it is important to prune with a view of where you want new branches to go. Always look to create a goblet shape with apples and pears.

2. Tidy up raspberry beds, remove weeds and mulch with compost but do not bury the raspberry canes. Tie the new canes to support wires to stop them rocking in winter winds.

3. Lift and divide large clumps of rhubarb on a dry day. Dig up the whole of a rhubarb crown and divide, making sure that each section has a shoot and healthy roots. Then replant in a new area and mulch with well-rotted manure.

4. Remove yellowed leaves on brassicas to avoid grey mould and downy mildew. Snap the leaf downwards from the stem and add to the compost heap.

5. Get tidying that shed before winter and clean and sharpen gardening tools all set for next year.



Get tidying the shed all set for next year

About **Andrew Oldham**

■ Andrew Oldham is a self-sufficient(ish) gardener who believes in the joy of down-to-earth growing and cooking. He lives high on the Saddleworth hills with his family at Pig Row. Find him on all social media platforms as **@lifeonpigrow**

THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Hitting the headlines, plus growing gooseberries and edible fungi

Anne explains how to have sweeter gooseberries and gets started with mushrooms

Back in the 1990s, I used to write gardening columns for the *News of the World*. My horticulture was serious but the subs would have fun with our headlines: 'Off to beds with some hoe hoe hoe', 'Make friends with anemones', 'Alpines are summit else' and 'My gourd! I've got a lot of bottle' are just a few examples that still make me chuckle. For five years I enjoyed the rapport with readers and also charging around the country in search of stories and interviews. One summer I set off for Cheshire on the trail of giant gooseberries, the headline for which would say 'Gooseberry fools'.

I remember opening the door of Swettenham's village hall, where instead of the usual warm welcome, a serious hush prevailed. Gooseberries the size of golf balls were being weighed on a pair of ancient scales, with the weights – in pennyweights – noted in a ledger. Competitors had picked their berries the night before, watched by an adjudicator to ensure they were grown on Swettenham soil, before being placed in small chests sealed with wax. The current world record for the heaviest gooseberry (a yellow 'Millennium' variety) stands at 65.59g (2.31oz), weighed at Egton Bridge, North Yorkshire, last August. Most of us are content to grow a good crop of average-sized berries for our crumbles and fools, however, opting for mildew resistance rather than supersize.

While I'm a confident forager of veg, herbs, flowers, fruit and weeds, my mushroom identification skills are below starter level. As poisonous and edible kinds can look remarkably similar, sticking to kits seems a safe option. Yet I love to see wild mushrooms or 'toadstools' pushing from lawns or rotting wood. Few fungi harm plants and, below the surface, their thread-like mycelium rots down organic matter or, in the case of mycorrhizal fungi, live symbiotically with plants to help them thrive.

From November onwards, nursery orders are fulfilled when deciduous, bare-rooted plants are lifted and sent out. But what happens when you are too busy to deal with them, or soil is unwelcoming? Heeling in is the answer.

Anne explains how she loves the wild mushrooms in her garden for their value to biodiversity but will be growing her own edible mushrooms from kits for safety

How to grow… the sweetest gooseberries

Early into growth and strung with small blooms and then veined, translucent fruits, gooseberries are both attractive and productive. If you think the berries are sour and not worth growing, then you've probably never planted a dessert variety or protected your fruit from birds. Wood pigeons and blackbirds visit early in the morning to pluck the sweetest, ripest gooseberries and leave the sour, unripe ones for another day. Consequently, these are the ones you gather and they'll be nasty raw and need a lot of sugar in their cooking. The solution is to wrap horticultural mesh around the bush, secured with old clothes pegs. Even fully ripened culinary varieties should be sweet enough to eat raw.

Unless your soil is unduly wet in winter, this is a good time to plant new bushes. Most kitchen garden beds are slightly raised or mounded for improved drainage and therefore ideal. Although gooseberries will grow and crop well in light shade, sunshine helps to ripen and sweeten the berries. Where space is an issue, train plants as standards with space beneath, or fans and cordons against walls, fences or wires. Ready-started trained forms are usually more expensive than bushes, but you could save money by taking 13 to 20cm (5 to 8in) long hardwood cuttings from a friend's gooseberry. From autumn to late winter, select firm stems produced the previous season, trim straight under a leaf or node at the base and slantwise above a leaf or node at the top. Insert 13cm (5in) apart into a narrow trench made in good soil, so the bottom two thirds of their stems are underground. Rooted, they deliver single-stemmed plants perfect for training.

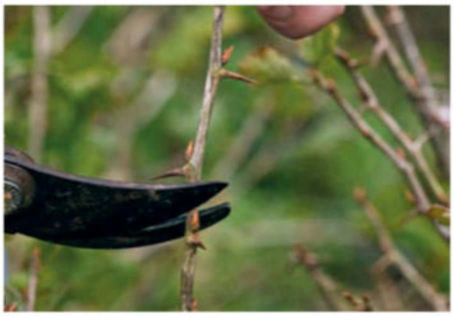
Anne explains how to enjoy the ripest gooseberries for eating fresh

© Shutterstock

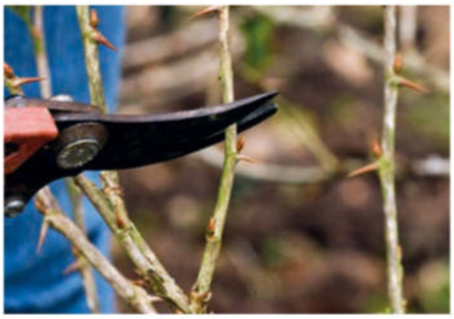
All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

Step by step Growing gooseberries

1 Anne protects the culinary gooseberry 'Invicta' from birds using mesh so that berries can ripen fully for the sweetest flavour



2 Prune gooseberries in winter by removing very old stems or those cluttering the centre. Then shorten leading shoots by half



3 Next prune the side shoots coming from the leading stems back to two buds. This will keep vigorous ones in check

Try these… dessert gooseberries

© Suttons

© Chris Bowers

© Chris Bowers

'Hinnonmaki Yellow'
Compared with the size and vigour of the old 'Invicta' I used to grow, this similarly mildew-resistant gooseberry takes up far less space and is perfect for a small garden or container. Plants set plenty of flavoursome yellow berries that are easy to eat straight from the bush when ripe. *www.suttons.co.uk*

'Leveller'
An heirloom cultivar producing large, sweet berries in June. Like many older gooseberries it is vulnerable to mildew, but good spacing, pruning for airflow and sunlight, and watering during droughts will help ward it off. *www.chrisbowers.co.uk*

'Martlet'
I would like to try this relatively new red-berried dessert gooseberry. Described as vigorous and mildew-resistant, it produces large, red, sweet berries in early June. Perhaps similar to the familiar 'Rokula' but with larger fruit.
www.rvroger.co.uk
www.chrisbowers.co.uk

MUSHRO
FROM RECYCLED

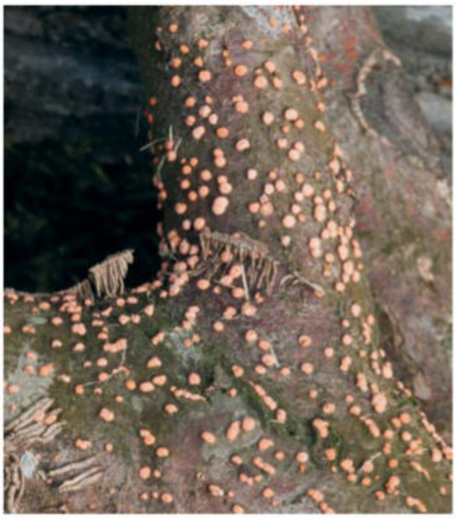
Oyster mushrooms from home-growing kits appear quickly. Get the best from your kit by re-wetting the bag of substrate to generate more mushrooms. You can also plant the mycelium on

Above: **Toadstools like these beauties frequently sprout from lawns, often in a linear fashion because their mycelium is busy feeding from dead and decaying underground tree roots. I would only remove them if they posed a threat to pets or children.**

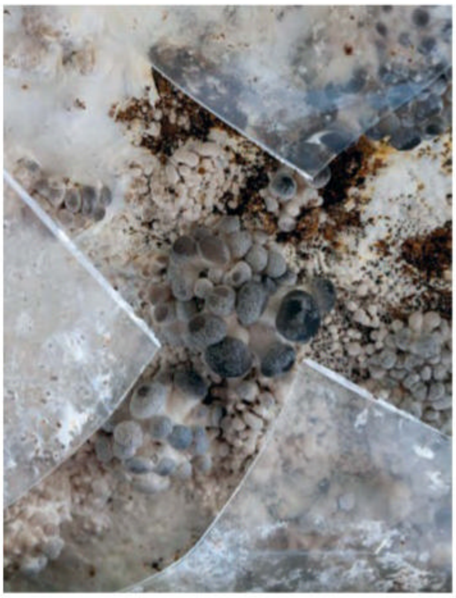
Growing mushrooms from kits

Once, every self-respecting estate would have had a walled kitchen garden with back buildings that included the head gardener's office, tool shed, potting shed, apple store and mushroom house. These days, we're lucky to have one shed, apple racks and a mushroom kit. Perfect for children and uncertain fungi foragers like me, kits have clear instructions, with the simple act of soaking or watering the mycelium-filled substrate stimulating a rash of tiny but ever-expanding mushrooms. There is usually an abundant first flush, followed by several smaller ones. Oyster mushrooms are fun, as they billow in great waves from their container and are not always readily available to buy fresh.

Patient mushroom growers drill holes in fresh, healthy hardwood logs (oak, beech, alder) for mycelium-impregnated dowels of oyster, lion's mane or shitake mushrooms. Once sealed in using melted beeswax, these are left in a moist, shady spot but should have some air circulation and be monitored.. An initial covering with polythene can help with mycelium growth but should be removed later and logs will need watering during droughts. Mushrooms usually appear within six months to two years and continue to crop for several years once the mycelium is fully established.



Above: **The coral-pink spore-bearing pustules of coral spot appear mainly on dead wood but the fungus can infect weak or stressed trees. Correct horticultural practice is to prune away and destroy, but I prefer just to ignore it**



Above: **The fruiting bodies (mushrooms) of the oyster mushroom mycelium when they start to form**

Wild fungi are welcome in my garden. We disturb our plantings and soil as little as possible and, over time, I've stopped worrying about pests and diseases. They are noted and understood but resident natural organisms, including fungi, seem to sort things out between them. We've had honey fungus and coral spot (both known to attack live plants) but they came and went with few losses.

Heeling in bare-root plants

Plants delivered bare-rooted are dug from nurseries during the dormant season, packaged and sent out. On arrival, unpack them promptly and make sure you are happy with what has arrived.

If you can't plant them immediately because of time pressures or soil conditions, dig a shallow trench, lay the roots in (the plants themselves can lie down at an angle) and backfill with soil over the roots so they are protected from wind and frost but will benefit from the daylight, fresh air, cool temperatures and natural rainfall outdoors.

If the plants are cheap and small, maybe pot them properly or plant in a nursery bed to grow on a bit where you can keep an eye on them.

Above: Cover the roots of bare-root plants, such as roses, with soil to protect them if you can't immediately plant them out

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Evergreen shrubs such as yew add structure and interest year-round, and can also be used to make your garden more private

6 great trees and shrubs for winter interest

Mike Palmer shares his suggestions for creating sharp shapes and year-round structure in the garden

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

> *"The sculpted hedge, when frost-hard, is a blade drawn clean against the grey"*
>
> *Garden writer Mirabel Osler (1925-2016)*

There's a stillness about winter that I adore. Our slumbering gardens glisten with silver frosts and drifts of diamond-dusted snow. It is a sight to behold and the antithesis of the long, sun-drenched days of summer, of which memories are fading fast. Weary gardeners (I'm sure I speak for all of us), will be snug in the cosy confines of a firelit lounge, perusing plant and bulb brochures and daydreaming of the season to come – and it'll be the best season ever, won't it?

But what makes the perfect winter garden? What is that magical ingredient that sets some gardens head and shoulders above others?

The answer, my lovely gardening friends, is something we can all bring to our gardens, if we haven't already, no matter their size. It is structure and, more specifically, a sharpness of structure that sits in stark contrast to the softer edges and focus that winter seems to bring with it.

I'm thinking of tightly clipped, geometrically-shaped evergreen, or ever-brown, hedges (all will be explained), and mesmerising topiary that's been trimmed just so to resemble peacocks, spheres, cones, cubes, spirals or tiered shapes.

Mike is a fan of sharply trimmed evergreens and uses them to add structure in his garden

Which plants to choose for sharp hedging or topiary?

Mike loves a bit of topiary and explains which plants he favours

There are numerous trees and shrubs that lend themselves perfectly to being shaped. Some of my recommendations provide tight-knitted foliage that the neighbourhood moggy could walk across; a horticultural cat-walk, if you will. Other options have a looser appearance, but can equally be shaped or topiarised.

Above: Mike's top pick is the yew for fantastic formal hedging and top topiary

Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

This holds the number one slot, for me. Its use became popularised in Tudor, Elizabethan and later formal gardens and those clever gardeners clearly knew a thing or two about yew, because while it symbolises eternal life, more importantly its dense growth and tolerance of heavy pruning make it an ideal candidate for formal hedges and topiary.

It has a reputation for being a bit of a slow grower, but not as slow as you might think. I planted two small, immature bare-root yew plants about four years ago and they have already formed striking cones. Unlike some of my recommendations here, yew can be cut back hard, even into old wood, allowing it to regenerate. It prefers a free-draining soil in sun or shade.

Christmas holly or *Ilex spp*

As we approach Christmas, holly, or *Ilex spp* to address it correctly, comes to mind. More open, in terms of its foliage, it's still a great year-round specimen for shaping.

Standard trees with huge globes atop, standing either side of a front door in large containers, make quite the statement. An almost obligatory red bow on each stem makes them the perfect Christmas welcome for carol singers and those bearing Christmas gifts. It's perfect in borders too.

It is best trimmed lightly in late spring to early summer to keep a neat, sharp shape and prefers moist, well-drained, loamy soils in a sunny or partially shaded position.

Above and inset: Holly has so many benefits in the garden. It's great for birds and of course a lovely 'ingredient' in Christmas wreathes and decorations

Above: Mike explains how to use and care for *Pittosporum* 'Irene Patterson'

Pittosporum 'Irene Patterson'

I have five pittosporum domes in my front garden. These provide great structure all year, but especially so in winter. The repetition of the same shrub provides greater impact.

I prune them lightly in late spring to early summer, but this showy foliage shrub will tolerate harder pruning, if required, and makes a great hedging or topiary plant. It tolerates sandy loamy and lighter clay soils.

Above: Beech is great for hedging and very similar in appearance to hornbeam

Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)

These two always used to get the better of me when I was studying horticulture, as they are very similar. They both respond well to light clipping and being used as hedging.

The leaves are marcescent, or ever-brown, meaning they stay brown but remain on the shrub until new growth pushes through in winter, which provides great cold-weather structure and interest

Bay (*Laurus nobilis*)

This tree is sharp on shape when clipped and its elliptical leaves can be used in a number of culinary dishes including soups, stews, sauces, meat and fish. This is another looser-foliaged plant that will respond well to clipping. I have seven around the back of my house and they give their best 365 days a year.

Mine are small standard trees in containers but bay can equally be grown in borders and shaped into pillows, cones, spirals, domes, or whatever takes your fancy.

Above: Bay is lovely to grow in containers and holds its shape well, but is equally as at home in borders and beds

Your buying options

Be it a formal hedge, or a topiarised shape you're aspiring to, there are a number of ways for gardeners to get started.

Whips
These immature plants are called 'whips', because that's what they resemble. Usually the cheapest option available and an excellent consideration for hedging projects. Best planted in the dormant season (October to February).

Bare-root
These smaller plants are lifted from the ground during their dormant season, with soil removed from their roots. It's the cheapest option although plants will require time to mature, which varies depending upon the plant you've selected. They need to be temporarily heeled in or properly planted upon purchase. Young plants, however, are generally vigorous growers, so if you're happy to allow plants to grow into their space this is a great option. Good for hedging projects.

Rootball
These plants are generally larger specimens, dug out of the soil and made available with soil around their roots, wrapped in hessian or similar material. They provide significantly greater impact than bare-root plants, albeit with a higher cost but cheaper than containerised plants. Best planted in the dormant season, they are good for hedging projects.

Container/pot-grown plants
This option allows gardeners to buy plants that have been grown and nurtured in containers or pots, which makes them more expensive than the previous two options, but they can be planted year-round, with significantly larger specimens available. Good for one-off topiary projects.

Pre-formed hedges
There are many hedging specialists which will provide mature plants as a pre-formed hedge. An expensive option, but one that yields instant results.

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Above: A young bay tree ready for planting on

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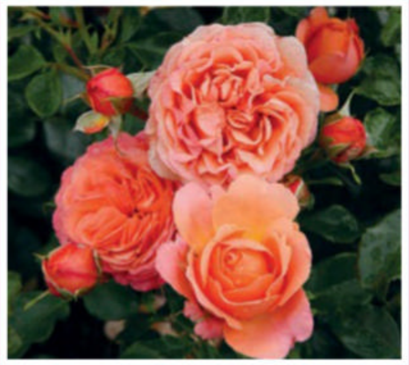

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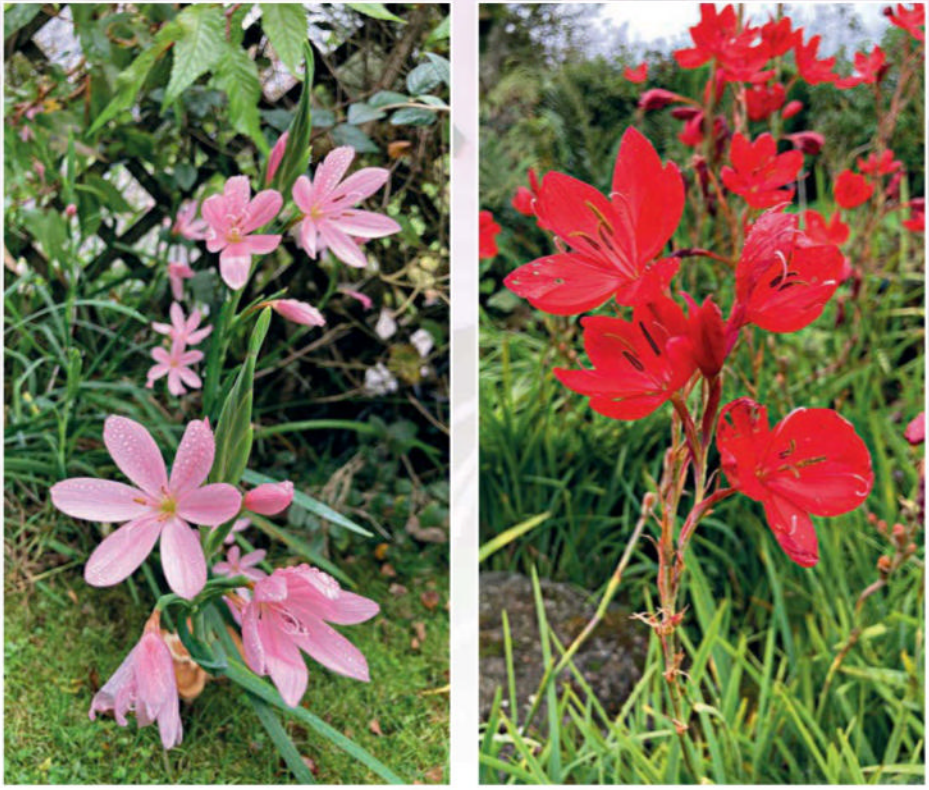
9 fantastic flowers and shrubs for late colour

Liz Zorab lists her favourites for early winter interest and scent



Above: The crimson flag lily comes in many cheerful colours

November is often the wettest month of the year, which means that we may well spend less time outside in the garden. That's why right now it's even more important to have colour in our borders to lift our spirits and encourage us to venture out between rain showers.

It is possible to have flowers, fragrance and vibrant berries in your garden all year round, you just need to know which plants to choose to secure these qualities during the cooler months. For most of us, tender types will have succumbed to frost by the end of November, but there are still plenty of hardy plants from which to choose.

I've been sorely lacking in my own planning because I have very few of these useful plants in my garden, so this is my wish list for plants that flower or have colourful berries in late autumn.

Hesperantha coccinea

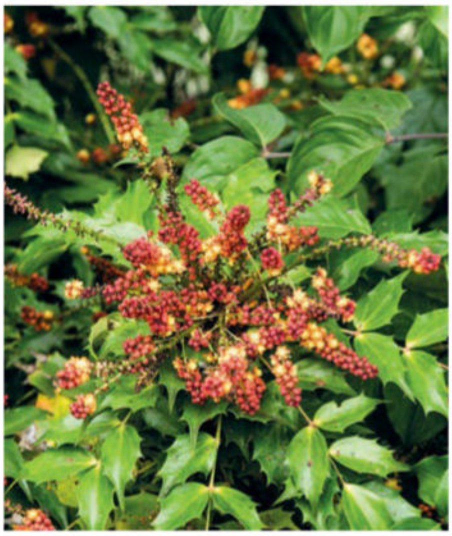
What could be better than a host of colourful stars nodding in the autumn breeze? The crimson flag lily, previously known as schizostylis, quickly forms a clump and produces flowers up to 4cm (1.5in) across on stems up to 60cm (2ft) tall. It is a semi-evergreen perennial, so in milder winters it will retain its foliage.

Grow in any type of soil that is moist but well-drained. It requires full sun and is best in a south-facing, sheltered position. That said, it grows very well on our north-facing but open hillside. Provide it with a sheltered position to protect against chilling winds. There are various cultivars with scarlet, pink and white blooms (for the white variety, search for *H. coccinea* f. *alba*).

Mahonia nitens 'Cabaret'

Some mahonias can become large and look a bit scruffy, not so with *Mahonia nitens* 'Cabaret', which has an upright and compact growth habit to 150cm (5ft) in height. This evergreen plant is unfussy about soil type and aspect, but prefers full sun or partial shade in a sheltered spot. It is hardy across most of the UK.

The flowers appear from late summer and continue through autumn. The buds are dark orange, almost red, and they open into yellow flowers.



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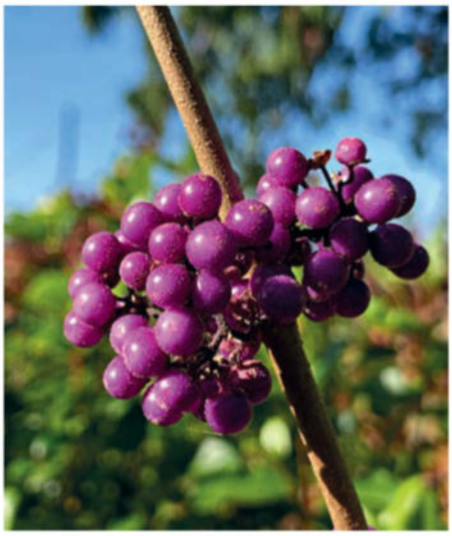
Above: *Mahonia nitens* 'Cabaret' (Oregon grape) is a compact variety



Above: The lovely lilac-coloured berries (inedible) of *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion Dwarf'

Callicarpa bodinieri var. *giraldii* 'Profusion Dwarf'

Although this deciduous shrub produces small lilac-coloured flowers in summer, it is usually grown for the intense magenta to lilac inedible berries that appear in clusters on the stems during the autumn.

All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab

The pretty delicate blooms of winter flowering pansies (*Viola spp*) Inset: **these grow well in pots too**

'Profusion Dwarf' grows to 150cm (5ft) in height and spread, while 'Profusion' is 250cm (8.1ft). The foliage also gives a good colour display over the year.

As long as you can provide a well-drained spot, it is unfussy about the soil type or the location and will thrive in full sun and partial shade. Hardy throughout the UK, Ireland and northern Europe.

Viola spp

I used to think that winter-flowering pansies were just for municipal bedding and turned my nose up at them for being rather old-fashioned.

But in recent years I have changed my mind completely. They are ideal for adding bright splashes of colour in containers and at the front of borders.

Winter-flowering pansies usually grow to 20cm (7.8in) in height and 15cm (6in) spread. They come in a variety of colours and are hardy across the UK and Ireland through all but the most severe of winters.

Grow in full sun or partial shade, in soil that is moist but well-draining. Make sure to check that you are buying plants labelled as winter-flowering pansies to ensure you get a great display of colour.

Nerine bowdenii

Commonly called the Guernsey lily, the flowers are held on stiff stems and the mid-pink petals are curled. They make a good splash of colour when many other plants are fading. *Nerine bowdenii* grow to 50cm (19.6in) height and 10cm (4in) spread and require full sun and well-draining soil. They are not completely hardy so need either a sheltered spot or to be grown in pots that can be moved under cover in cooler gardens. In either case, a protective mulch over the winter is a good idea.

Coronilla valentina subsp. *glauca* 'Citrina'

A bushy shrub that we had in our previous home and I'd really like for our current garden. It has cheerful yellow flowers during the coldest months of the year and a lemony floral fragrance that can be detected from several feet away. Usual height 1m (3.3ft), although our plant reached over 1.2m (3.9ft), and 1m (3.3ft) spread.

The leaves are a blue-grey green and as an evergreen shrub provide interest all year round. *Coronilla valentina* subsp. *glauca* 'Citrina' is unfussy about soil type, but does require full sun and a sheltered position. It is hardy across most of the UK, although may struggle in temperatures below -10°C.

Above: *Nerine bowdenii* (the Guernsey lily) is pretty in pink later in the year

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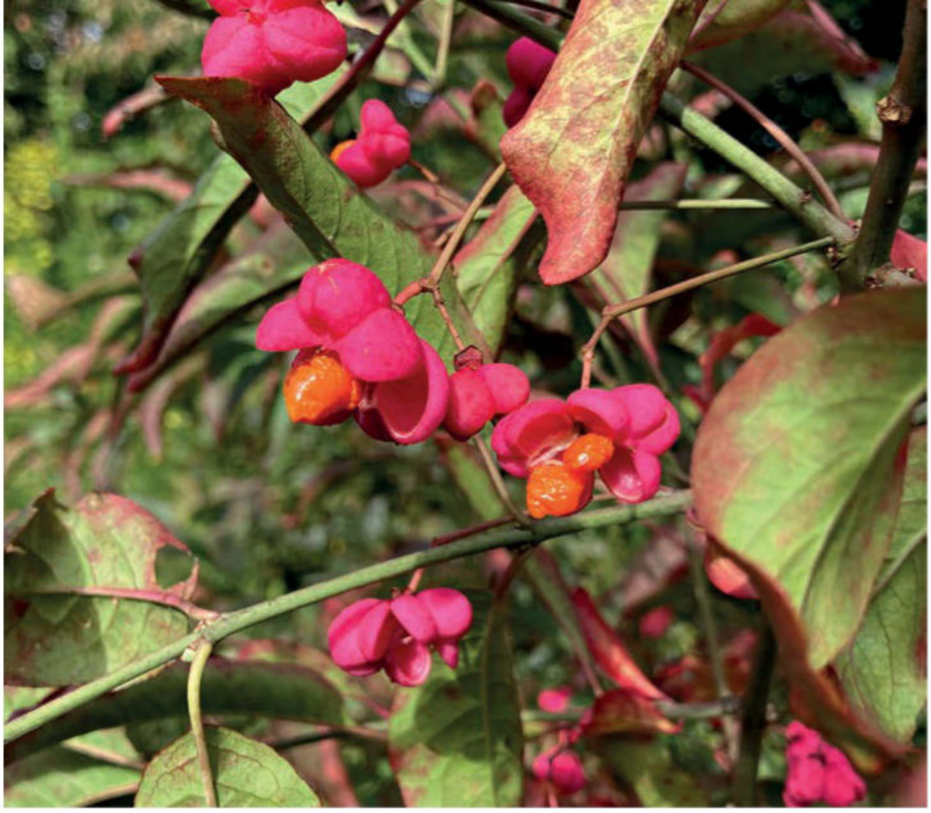
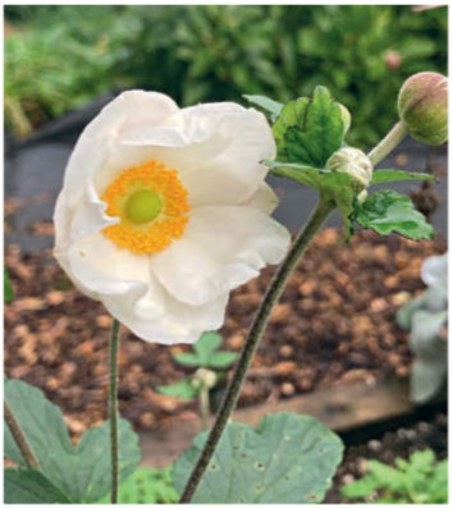
Above: **Cheerful yellow flowers and lemony scent of *Coronilla valentina* subsp. *glauca* 'Citrina'**



Above: *Euonymus europaeus* (spindle or spindle berry) has colourful leaves and pink (inedible) berries



Above: *Anemone × hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert' (Japanese anemone) with semi-double, white flowers

Euonymus europaeus

Commonly known as spindle or spindle berry, this is a vigorous deciduous shrub that can also be grown as a small tree.

It reaches up to 3m (9.8ft) in height and spread and has the added interest of pink or red leaves in autumn.

After producing small flowers earlier in the year, inedible pink fruits that open to display orange seeds appear in autumn. The colours are so bright in the autumn light that they stand out and call for our attention. Grow in full sun or partial shade, in any soil type and in any position. It is fully hardy across the UK, Ireland and the rest of northern Europe.

Viburnum × bodnantense 'Dawn'

This eye-catching shrub can flower from late autumn right through to spring. It produces pink and white flowers in clusters on the bare branches.

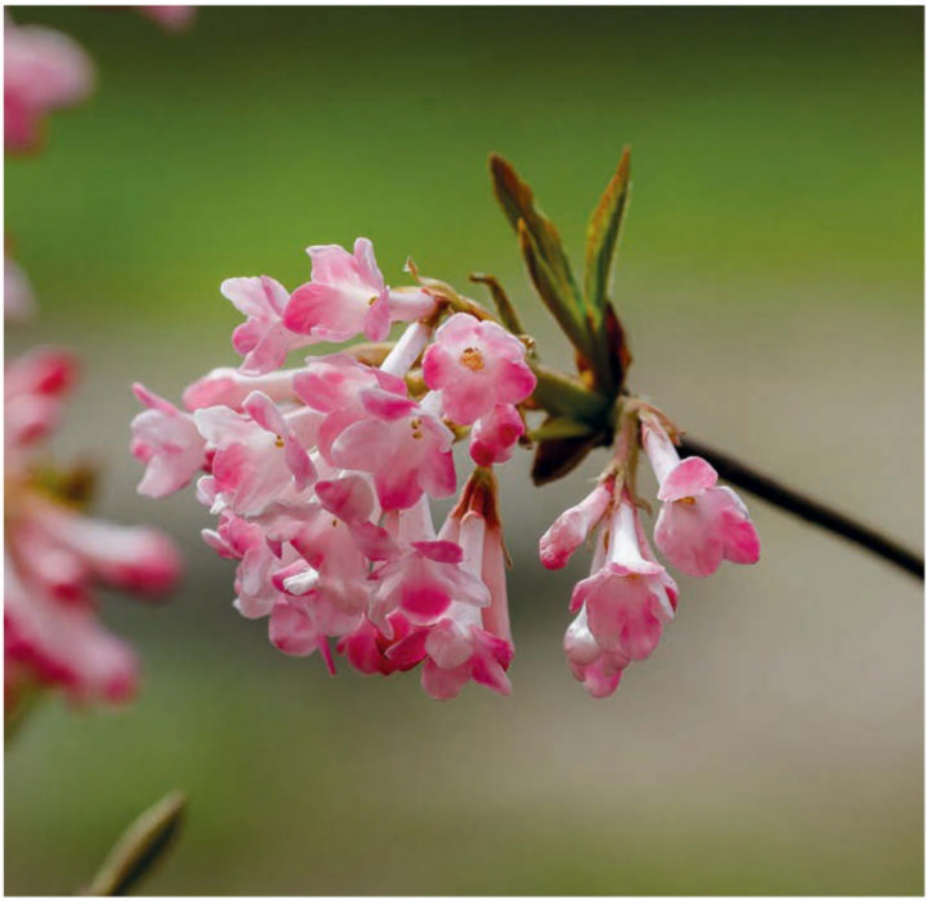
Viburnum × bodnantense 'Dawn' is unfussy about soil and situation and as long as the position is not water-logged, it should thrive. Hardy throughout the UK, its ease of growing makes it a popular choice. Height 150cm to 250cm (4.9 to 6ft) and spread 100 to 150cm (3.3 to 5ft).

Anemone × hybrida 'Honorine Jobert'

Here's one that I do have in the garden. A lovely Japanese anemone that has semi-double, crisp white flowers with golden stamens at the centre. It is semi-evergreen, meaning that in warmer areas or a mild winter, it may remain in leaf throughout the winter.

It is unfussy about soil type or aspect and prefers moist but well-drained soil. Hardy throughout the UK, Ireland and the rest of northern Europe, 'Honorine Jobert' grows to 120cm (4ft) tall and has an RHS Award for Garden Merit. It is worth noting that it dislikes root disturbance and may fail to thrive if moved.

Once firmly established, it has the potential to spread and become a nuisance. In a small garden it may be better to grow in a large tub or half-barrel. Alternatively, you can remove any sections that have outgrown their allotted spaces.



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Above: *Viburnum × bodnantense* 'Dawn' is easy to grow and easy on the eye

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Rosie's retro revival

Beautiful Cape mallow is a year-round superstar and flowers even during the colder months when many other plants have tucked themselves away for winter

© Shutterstock

The mellow mallow with year-round charm

Rosie Irving explains why this hardy cousin of hibiscus and lavatera offers something for every season

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

In this edition I'm focusing on *Anisodontea capensis*, commonly called African or Cape mallow. This is a plant that falls into the 'why don't more people grow this?' category and, I suspect, by the time you finish reading all about it, you'll be wanting to add one to your garden. If you do so, many visitors to your garden will want to know what it is and where to buy it.

Shining the light on a South African shrub

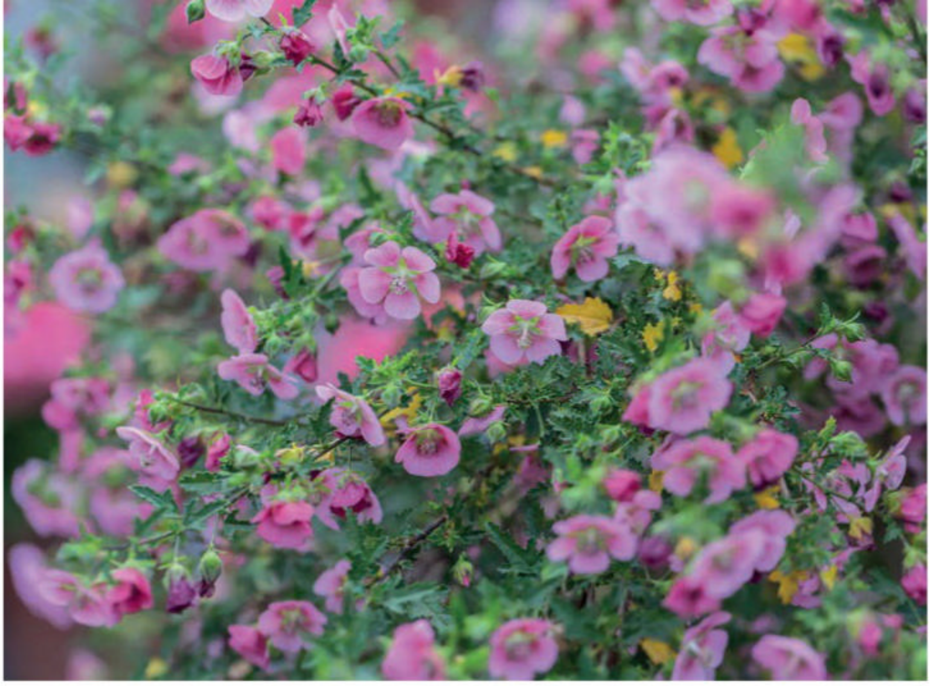
History

A cloud of mystery shrouds information about when this delightful shrub was first introduced to the UK. It's believed to have arrived in the early 1800s, at a time when plant hunters were exploring South Africa, but nobody knows who first brought it here.

It most probably arrived via the Royal Botanic Gardens' Cape plant exchange network, along with *Pelargonium* and *Agapanthus* species, and would have been grown in Kew's glasshouses due to the plant's lack of hardiness at that time.

The fact that it grows well in the mountain scrub regions of South Africa's Western Cape, where the soil is

Rosie is on a mission to rehabilitate brilliant Cape mallow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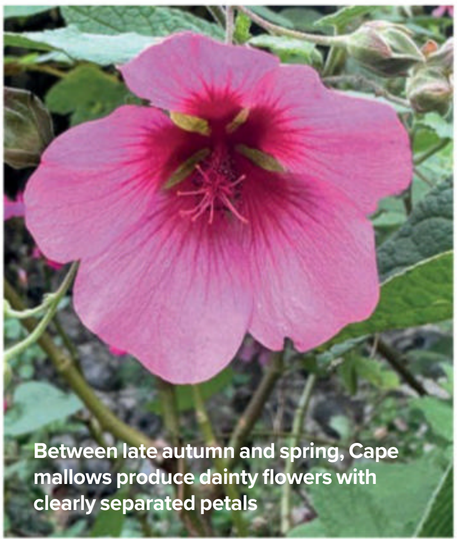
Above: Cape mallow will produce a flush of long-lasting flowers if grown in a sheltered spot


Between late autumn and spring, Cape mallows produce dainty flowers with clearly separated petals

poor, the summers dry and the winters cool and damp, has meant that once established, it is surprisingly resilient in sheltered parts of UK gardens.

So it wasn't until the late 1900s that tender, shrubby perennials such as the African mallow became popular for growing in containers to extend the season of colourful flowers in the garden, especially smaller ones. Also, plant breeders were creating hybrids more suited to the growing conditions here.

At first glance, the flowers of African mallow could be mistaken for either hibiscus or the mallow-like lavatera, and it's easy to see why as all three belong to the family *Malvaceae* and have pink flowers with a five-petalled saucer shape.

What's in a name?

Most of the plants grown in the UK and around the world were named by Carl Linnaeus, but it seems that although other members of the mallow family were known and named by him, anisodontea escaped his eagle eye and was not officially named until 1845 by Czech botanist Karel (Carl) Presl.

The name means 'unequal teeth', referring to the irregular toothed edges to the leaves.

Problems to watch out for

Whitefly and red spider mite if growing in a conservatory or greenhouse.

Root rot if soil becomes waterlogged.

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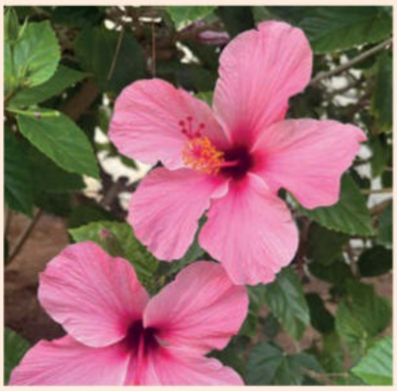
Bees and butterflies love these flowers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Above: The prominent stigma, shown here, suggest that this is a hibiscus, which is related to Cape mallow

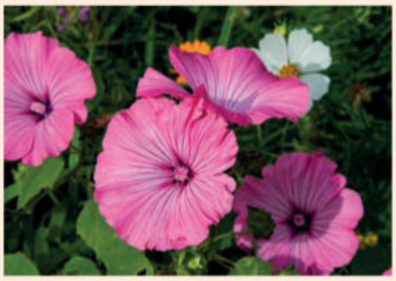
How to tell the three apart?

If you're looking at a finely branched, elegant, airy shrub with small, toothed, soft, velvety leaves and dainty, slightly nodding pink flowers, it's most likely to be an anisondontea.

If it's a woody shrub with coarser-looking leaves and congested branch structure with very prominent stigmas sticking out from the centre of the flower, it's probably hibiscus.

If the flowers are large and rounded with very little gaps between the petals, and the leaves are large on a more upright, bushy shrub, the chances are you're looking at a lavatera.

The big giveaway is the time of flowering. If you see dainty pink flowers between late autumn and spring, it's almost certain to be anisodontea, as lavatera generally flowers from summer to early autumn and hibiscus from late summer to early autumn.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Above: Lavatera is another cousin of mallow, and you can tell them apart because its flowers are larger and the petals very close together

Above: Rosie suggests growing potted mallows close to a sheltering wall in colder areas

How to grow

The most important things are to shelter cape mallow from cold winds and avoid planting in soil that becomes waterlogged.

It prefers full sun but will cope with part shade.

Needs free-draining soil, and this is very important as excessive moisture around the roots is more likely to kill it than, say, a heavy frost.

Water regularly until established, after which it should be remarkably drought-tolerant.

In colder or more exposed regions, plant in a large container close to the shelter of a house wall so it can bask in the reflected heat. Make sure it's watered regularly.

Since it roots so easily from semi-ripe cuttings, you could plant some near your fruit and veg patch to encourage pollinators.

Why you'll love it once you discover it

Non-stop colour! If planted in a sheltered position in a mild part of the country, it can flower for 365 days a year. It truly is a horticultural flowering miracle!

- Easy-going
- Drought tolerant once established.
- Perfect for containers
- Roots very easily from cuttings; the ideal time to take semi-ripe cuttings is late summer, but worth trying any time of the year.
- Light airy habit
- Easy to look after
- Relatively pest and disease-free

Anisodontea capensis grows well with

- *Dierama spp* (angel's fishing rod)
- *Phlox spp*
- *Artemisia spp*; the silver grey foliage a perfect foil for anisodontea's pretty pink flowers
- *Oenothera lindheimeri* (gaura)
- Salvias
- *Symphyotrichum spp* (aster)

Above: The nonstop colour of anisodontea is sure to impress

Did you know

- Bees, especially solitary and bumblebees, adore the open flower structure of cape mallow, which makes it easier for them to access the nectar.
- Many of its flowers have dark veins or a central dark eye to guide bees straight to the nectar; one of nature's signposts.
- It's incredibly fast growing and can grow from 15cm (6in) to 90cm (3ft) in a year if planted in a south-facing location.
- Paradoxically, it flowers more prolifically during the colder months, making it the ideal autumn/winter 'cheer yourself up' plant.

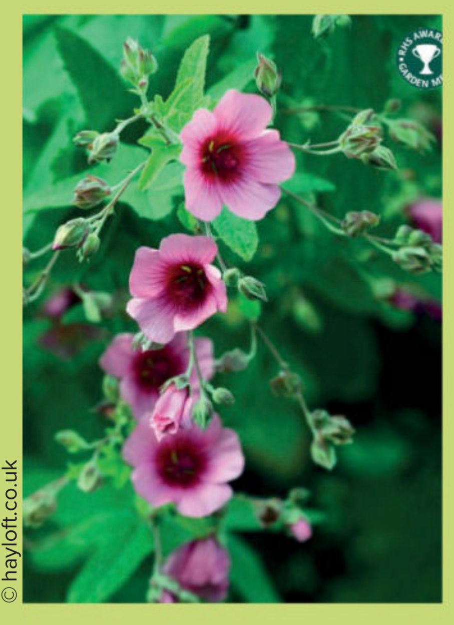
Wildlife benefits

Quick refuge for birds as the airy foliage makes it the perfect spot for perching or hiding

Create mini nectar corridors by growing several plants from cuttings and planting them close together to attract small butterfly species, which love resting and feeding on its flowers.

Its extended flowering seasons and the pollen-rich stamens help pollinators access food at a time of year when other flowers are scarce - such as in early spring when queen bumblebees emerge from hibernation.

3 of the best



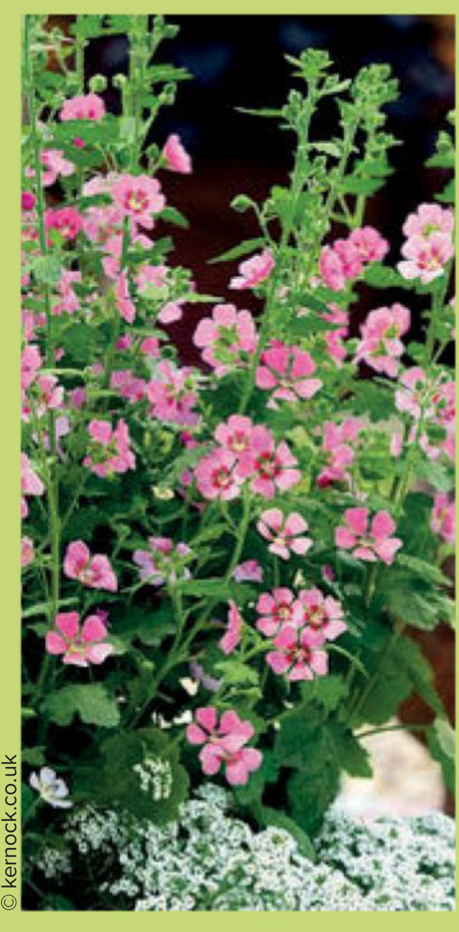
© hayloft.co.uk

'El Rayo'
Height and spread 100cm (39in)

Found as a chance seedling and introduced to the UK by Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Plants, who states the correct name should be 'El Royo', but you'll find it predominantly sold as 'El Rayo'.

Like most anisodontea, it produces more flowers during the autumn and winter months. The single flowers are mid-pink with deeper reddish-pink centres on airy, bendy, branching stems amid mid-green leaves.

Give it a sunny spot in free-draining soil and prune by about half after all risk of frost has passed in late spring to encourage more flowers.



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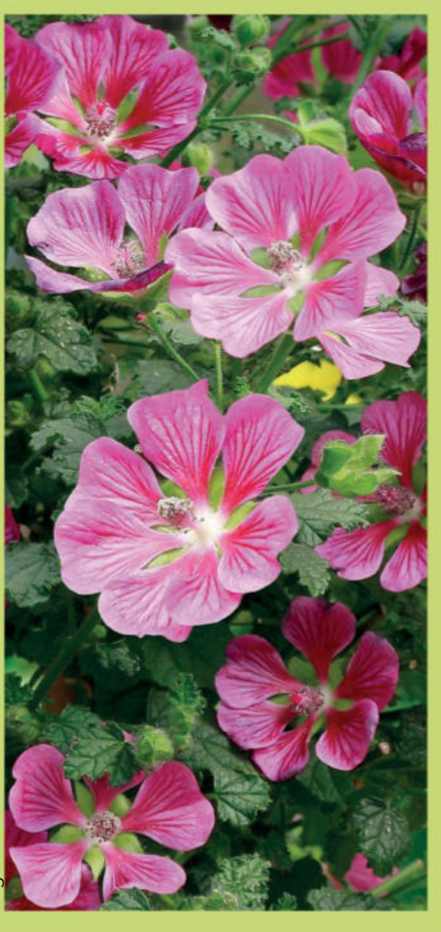
'Lady in Pink'
Height and spread 40cm (16in) by 30cm (12in)

A compact variety ideal for growing in pots due to its size, shape and frost tenderness. Smothered in strawberry-pink flowers, it is an absolute delight.



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A. capensis
Height and Spread 80cm (31in) by 60cm (24in).

A shorter species with dark green glossy leaves and darker pink flowers than 'El Rayo'. This is another ideal choice for a container or front of the border.

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Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Acers are ace!

Maples (forms of acer) are best known for their autumn foliage that has tints of gold, orange, ochre, copper, red and russet. And, this autumn, they have not disappointed!

- For most of us, the small and medium-sized Japanese maples tick our boxes; a garden centre displaying a 'Maples' sign might stock just these! However, the acer is a diverse genus, giving everything from small plants for patio pots, to enormous parkland trees.
- Although the Canadian flag contains what is supposed to be the leaf silhouette of a North American sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), it is actually a stylised 11-point leaf. Normally, a real sugar maple leaf has 23 points!

Maple syrup

Commercial maple syrup is made from the sap of several maples, particularly the sugar maple (*A. saccharum*), red maple (*A. rubrum*) and black maple (*A. nigrum*). In principle, all acers can be tapped and, in late winter, exude sap which can be boiled down to make the syrup. However, after the leaf buds open in early spring, the syrup develops a kind of 'off' flavour.

- The Canadian province of Quebec produces around 70 per cent of the world's supply of maple syrup, at around 8 million gallons annually.

Wow! I didn't know that!

- The red maple (*A. rubrum*) has many uses. The Native Americans used the bark as a wash for inflamed eyes and cataracts, as a remedy for muscular aches, as a tea to treat coughs and diarrhoea, as brown and black dyes, and (by adding iron sulphate) to make ink.
- Traditionally, the wood of field maple (*A. campestre*) is used in woodturning, as veneer and to make musical instruments, including harps.
- The sugar maple (*A. saccharum*) is often confused with the similarly named silver maple (*A. saccharinum*).
- Over the winter of 2011-12, almost 3,000 tons of maple syrup, valued at more than C$18m, was stolen from a storage facility in Quebec. Nicknamed the "Great Canadian Maple Syrup Heist", it rates as the most valuable theft in Canadian history!

This fortnight in gardening history

19 Nov 1974 Following a proposal by ivy enthusiast Stephen Tafler, a meeting was held at the RHS offices in London, attended by members of RHS Council. It was decided that there should be a British Ivy Society. It did good work, correctly naming ivy clones, but Stephen died in 2005, by which time the Society had all but disappeared.

25 Nov 1892 'John Downie' is an old variety of crab apple, with pink buds followed by white flowers, and then bright orange and red fruits. It was named after Edinburgh nurseryman John Downie, who died on this day. His nursery boasted palm and begonia houses, while he also owned a florist's shop in Princes Street.

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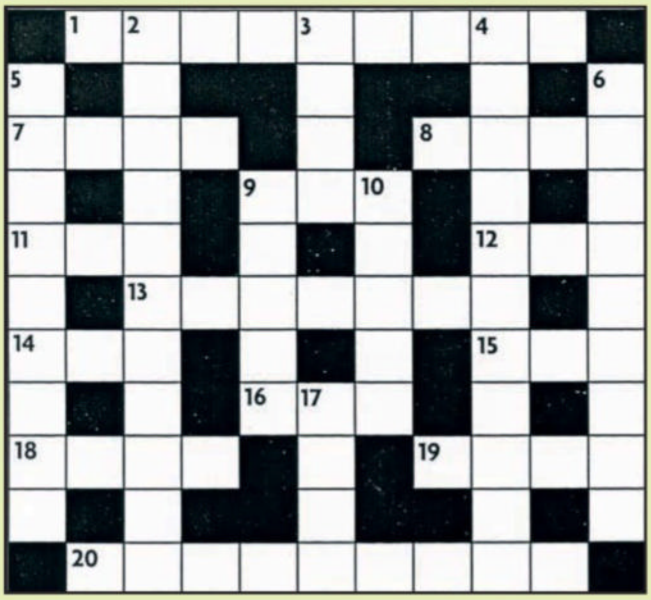
Crossword... *just for fun!*



ACROSS

1 Jet cones, I propel them all out! (9) (anag)
7 Developed fully, as in a fruit, so that it is ready for picking (4)
8 One is really enthusiastic about the middle part of a davidia! (4)
9 Salad vegetables are generally eaten in this state (3)
11 In botany, a hair-like appendage on a larger structure – and three quarters of a lawn (3)
12 Three quarters of a leek is out of the wind! (3)
13 This variety of Japanese sedge (*Carex oshimensis*) is a mountain! (7)
14 Fleur-de-____: stylised lily or iris used in symbolism (3)
15 *Taxus cuspidata* is the Japanese ____ (3)
16 Another name for *Crataegus monogyna* (hawthorn) (3)
18 Sounds like a greeting, but it's actually a succulent genus! (4)
19 This rhododendron variety is also the god of thunder! (4)
20 Common name for scutellarias, flowering plants of the mint family (9)

DOWN

2 Despite its species name, *Quercus mongolica* has this common name! (8,3)
3 Sounds like a dahlia's root system, but it's actually a brass instrument! (4)
4 Peony H Volts – an emporium selling miscellaneous and fun items (7,4) (anag)
5 Trees, mainly, with wide and flat foliage (as opposed to conifer-like trees with needles) (9)
6 Another name for the common bistort (*Bistorta officinalis*) (9)
9 The rhubarb genus (5)
10 With groundsel, dandelions and couch grass everywhere, your garden could be described as this! (5)
17 In botany, the angle or point of divergence between the upper side of a branch or leaf, and the stem from which it springs (4)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 1 Ejections 7 Ripe 8 Avid 9 Raw 11 Awn 12 Lee 13 Everest 14 Lys 15 Yew 16 May 18 Aloe 19 Thor 20 Skullcaps **DOWN** 2 Japanese oak 3 Tuba 4 Novelty shop 5 Broadleaf 6 Adderwort 9 Rheum 10 Weedy 17 Axil

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Lose yourself in the beauty of the skies by cloud spotting. Either wrap up warm to do this in your garden or opt for the cosiness of your own home

Gardening for wellbeing

In this monthly series, the fantastic folk at health charity **Thrive** offer some lovely project ideas to help you find excuses to enjoy the nurturing potential of your garden and the natural world at large.

Project – Go cloud spotting

Duration: 10 minutes or more

For this activity you can spend a few minutes looking up and watching the relaxing clouds, which provides a welcome distraction and helps bring about a sense of calm.

You could do this by looking out the window, or you could take the opportunity to combine your cloud watching with a longer walk to get yourself outdoors and moving.

The opportunity to identify different cloud types can also help promote lifelong learning.

Where to cloud watch: Garden, patio, balcony or through a window

Go cloud spotting

Cloud spotting is delightfully simple. All you need to do is look up!

If the weather is not good, or you are low on energy, you can do this by looking out of a window, all cosy inside.

If you would like to get outside, this is a perfect opportunity to stand or sit wrapped up warm in the garden, or take a walk and look at the clouds.

Try hard to be in the moment when you are looking.

Make observations

Maybe make a written description. You can then look up the cloud types afterwards.

Watching the clouds can soothe stressed minds, inspire creativity and give us a break on busy days

Think how would you describe them? Are they big/small, grey/white, high up/low?

How fast are they moving?

Can you see any shapes in them?

How do these clouds make you feel?

If you like, you could write down your thoughts about cloud spotting. Or, you can just enjoy thinking about it in the here and now.

How to reach out to others

Here are some ways to make cloud spotting a shared activity:

- Go for a walk with someone else and work together to see if you can identify the cloud type
- Take a photo of the clouds and share it with someone
- You could turn a cloud photo into a card or print and gift it to someone

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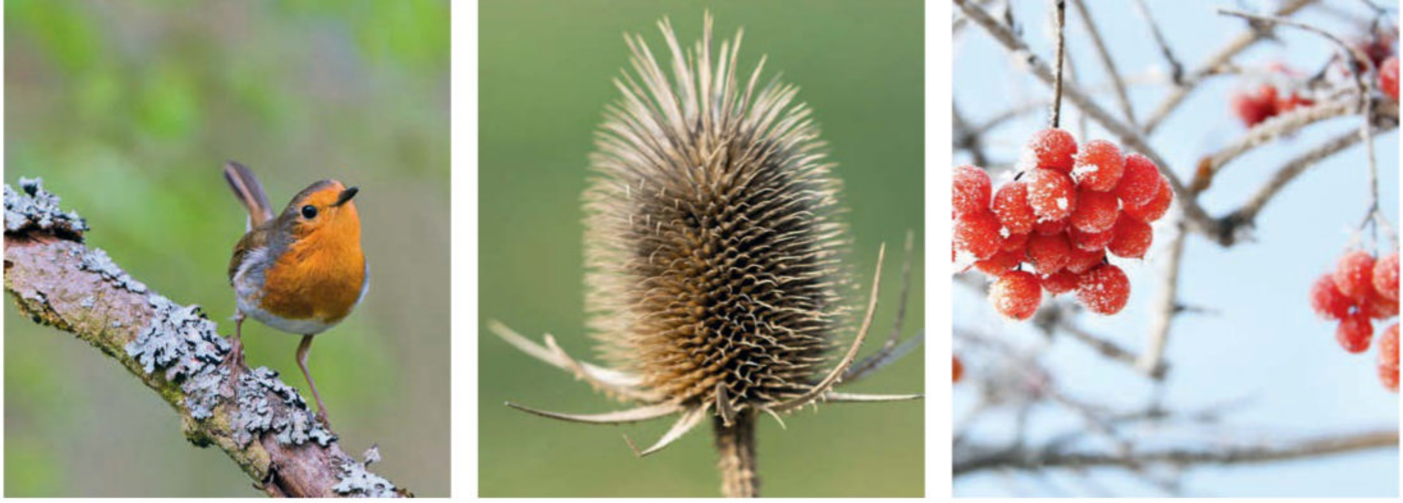


Above: Autumn and winter lend themselves to beautiful photographs, with rosy robins, structural plants and bright, frosted berries

Project – Try nature photography

Duration: from 15 minutes
Focusing on the nature around you and what interests you in order to take a photo allows you to immerse yourself in what you see and can make your feel refreshed and less stressed.

This provides the opportunity for unrestricted creativity. You could take a collection of photos, or different views or angles of the same space or object. Do whatever you feel like doing to capture the beauty of the natural world.

Where to do this: In your garden, the local park, or somewhere new

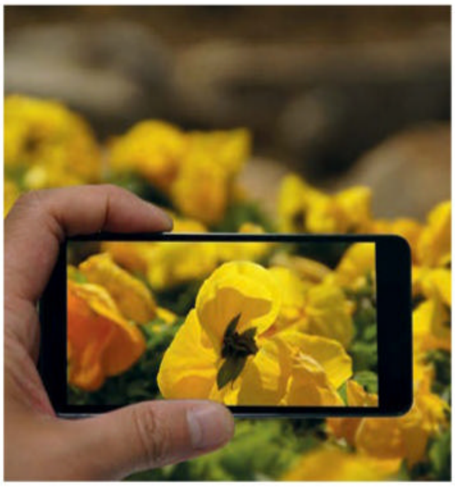
Items you will need

- Nature in some form for inspiration
- A camera or phone/tablet that can take photos

Find your source of inspiration

The natural environment is a beautiful thing. We often see many amazing sights when we spend time in nature.

Your nature photo – or photos – can be of anything you like. To find inspiration, you could take a walk around your garden or local park to see what is there and look and observe and think what you'd like to photograph.



Above: You can find photographic inspiration in the wider natural world, but there is also plenty to see in your own garden

Connect with others

Here are some ways to make nature photography a shared activity:

- Show or send your photo to someone else. You could encourage them to try taking their own.
- When finding sources of nature inspiration, take a walk with someone else and talk about the things you see around you.
- Work together with others to create a collection of photos around a specific subject or area, creating a wider piece of art.
- Your images could be turned into a print for the wall, or cards to send to others.

If you can't get outside, do you have a view of nature from inside that might make an interesting photo? Or, maybe you have some interesting houseplants that would make a good subject?

Let's get snapping

You can use any form of camera for this. It can be the one on your mobile phone - it doesn't need to be a fancy.

Taking a photo of something in nature gives you the opportunity to focus solely on what is in front of you. Take time to really see it and enjoy being away from the stresses of daily life.

You could try taking a close-up photo, or a wider view of your favourite green space. Try not to overthink it and just enjoy the process of capturing what you see. If you are taking a photo of something close-up, remember to keep it in focus. Most cameras or phones do this automatically, but if the subject is too close you might need to tap the phone screen to help it focus.

You could take one photo or a collection of photos that day. You could also repeat your visit regularly and keep a visual record of how the environment changes across the year.

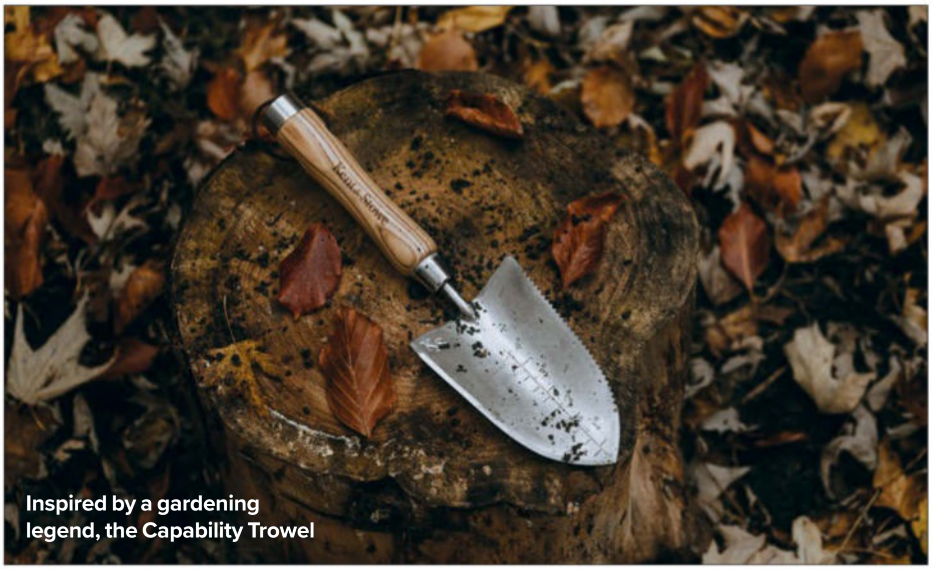
Would you like more wellbeing inspiration?

Thrive is a gardening for health charity that supports people to transform their lives through gardening.

Find more wellbeing gardening activities on the Cultivating Wellbeing app from Thrive helping you garden your way to better health. Create a personalised garden and nature wellbeing plan, choose from seasonally relevant activities, record thoughts in a refection diary and get gentle motivation to keep on track.
www.thrive.org.uk/cultivatingwellbeing

Gardener gift ideas

Here are some product suggestions for the practially minded from the team at *AG* mag



Inspired by a gardening legend, the Capability Trowel

Inspiring and hard-working gardening trowel

Inspired by the legacy of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, one of England’s greatest gardeners, the Capability Trowel has been designed in line with his belief that in gardening, everything could be improved. This trowel has the functionality to execute many gardening tasks. Its clever design includes a hammer for hammering canes and posts, as well as a serrated edge for weeding and opening bags of compost. It is perfect for measuring the planting depth for seeds and bulbs and even offers a 20-year guarantee! It is made from FSC® certified ash wood and is contoured for a comfortable grip.

RRP £14.99. Available at many good garden centres or online at Kent & Stowe.

Fantastic heritage veg advent calendar

Ideal for gardeners and foodies alike, enjoy a truly unique countdown to Christmas this year with She Grows Veg’s heirloom seed advent calendar.

This totally unique and beautifully-presented calendar includes 25 individually wrapped, numbered envelopes in brightly coloured veg-inspired wrapping paper with each containing a packet of seeds. The envelopes come in a festive eco cotton sack that can be reused again in the garden for tools, seeds or equipment after the festivities.

As you tick off each day until the big event, you will delight in discovering a new seed variety, with detailed instructions on the back explaining how to grow them and a QR code linking to a YouTube video that will give confidence to gardeners of all experience levels.

Available to buy online (RRP £70) via *www.shegrowsveg.com*

Top of the tulips

It’s the perfect time to plant tulips, or give a little gift of bulbs to brighten someone’s day! All spring bulbs can be planted until around mid-December, but tulips in particular love to go into the ground when it’s cold and crisp outside. There is nothing better to transform the spring garden than a pretty panoply of tulips. Whether your heart lies with harmonious pastel shades or you prefer the jazz of jewel colours, there are so many tulips to choose from and something to suit every style!

www.farmergracy.co.uk

Above: Farmer Gracy offer a fantastic range of tulip bulb collections

New Flower Market range of bulbs from M&S

This year, M&S Flower Market is redefining gardening for a new generation with the biggest upgrade to its bulb range in decades with the launch of a wider range of exclusive, exciting new varieties. These are guaranteed to excite seasoned and first-time buyers alike.

With its exclusive varieties, premium quality and stylish new designs, the M&S Flower Market 2025 bulb range is set to inspire a new wave of gardeners and prove that bulbs really are ‘blooming brilliant’!

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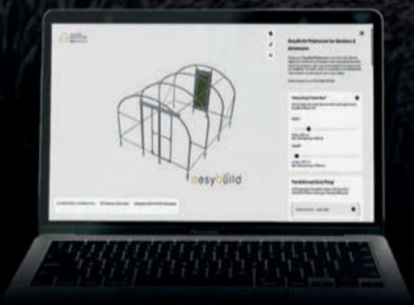

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Homegrown health

New series

How to grow and use beneficial thyme

Ellen Mary sings the praises of this health-boosting Mediterranean herb

By mid-November the garden gives a sigh as deciduous trees are almost, if not fully, bare, leaving their structure visible and stately for us to admire. Seeing bare trees against a clear winter sky brings me some ease as it's a sign that we too can take time to rest and re-energise, and that wonderful earthy scent on a cool morning, with dew on the grass and leaves holding on hedges, is both beautiful and calming. Cultivated beds may be less full and many crops will be over, meaning it's a time to sit back and reflect on what's been achieved in the garden this year before beginning to slowly plan for the following one.

Herbs can really boost the winter transitional period, either in the form of herbal concoctions made earlier in the year or perennial herbs that are growing on for longer and can be harvested and worked with now. Moving from gluts and heavy crops, herbal harvests are about simplicity and wellness at this later season and thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is a perfect herb to harvest. Thyme grown in a sheltered spot in the garden may still be available, but a pot of thyme on a windowsill provides the reminder that life continues even when the garden isn't bustling.

Thyme is rooted in history, having been used for thousands of years. It was used as incense in Greek temples and in embalming rituals; thyme-infused water helped Roman soldiers to recuperate, and it was said to keep nightmares away in the Middle Ages. In Victorian times, it was used to symbolise courage and strength. It is now cultivated all around the world for the kitchen and continues to be enjoyed by bees, grown as lawns and enjoyed in herbal medicines and wellness routines.

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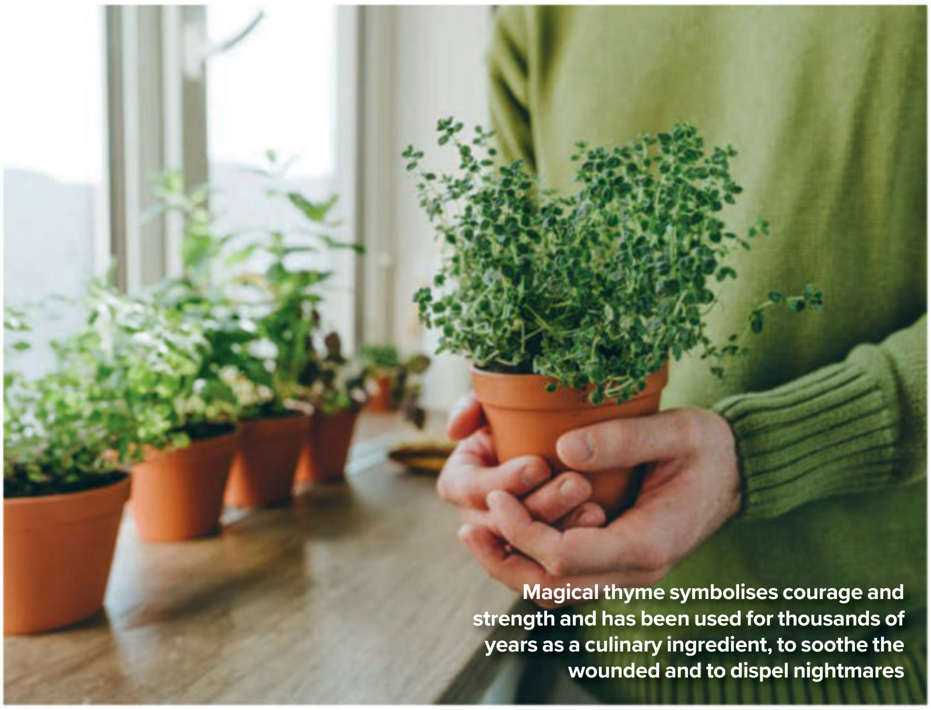


Magical thyme symbolises courage and strength and has been used for thousands of years as a culinary ingredient, to soothe the wounded and to dispel nightmares

Top 5 growing tips

Don't overwater
Thyme is a superb addition to a drought-tolerant garden, especially planted with other Mediterranean herds such as lavender and rosemary.

Use regularly
Trimming thyme for use also helps to manage its growth, keeping it productive and in good shape.

Plant in sunshine
As a Mediterranean herb, thyme enjoys the sun and the leaves will be more flavoursome for it.

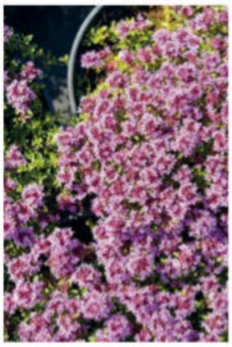
Use gravel
It is great for drought-tolerant plants and can recreate the natural environment. It suppresses weeds, helps drainage and increases soil temperature.

Provide shelter
Thyme is hardy but frozen conditions can damage plants, especially when they're in pots. Move to a sheltered spot if possible or cover with some horticultural fleece as needed.

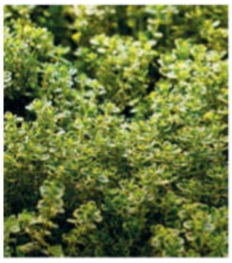
Thyme loves the sun but may be damaged by hard frosts, so move it somewhere sheltered in winter if it is practical to do so

4 favourite thyme varieties

There are many exciting varieties of thyme to grow with surprisingly different uses and tastes. Here are some I highly recommend:



1. *Thymus* Coccineus Group has vibrant flowers and can be grown as a heavenly lawn for pollinators. This will also creep wonderfully well around paving stones and grow beautifully in rockeries.



2. *Thymus citriodorus* - Lemon thyme has a distinctive citrus scent and can be used for cooking. It works well with roasted winter vegetables.

© Crocus

3. *Thymus citriodorus* GrowFlow™ Lemonade This has an incredible fizzy lemonade-like scent. You may wonder how a plant can smell 'fizzy' - but it does! This also has pretty pink flowers in summer.

4. *Thymus herba-barona* is known as caraway thyme. It has a low-growing, creeping habit and a spicy caraway scent and flavour.

© Ellen Mary

Above: You can grow more thyme plants by sowing seeds, dividing mature clumps and taking cuttings

How to propagate thyme

Seeds

The cheapest option is to sow seeds undercover during early spring in some moist peat-free compost. Seeds usually take a couple of weeks to germinate and can be moved on from trays to individual modules or pots when they are strong enough to be handled. Harden off and plant outside after the last frosts once they are large enough and have established roots in the pot. It may be another year before you are able to harvest sprigs, but it's so worth it.

Division

The easiest and free way to propagate is by gently lifting an established plant and dividing it into smaller clumps, which can each be replanted straightaway.

Cuttings

Softwood cuttings of about 10cm (4in) long can be taken in late spring. Remove the lower leaves and plant in a free-draining compost mixed with perlite. Keep moist but don't overwater and you should see roots around a month after planting.

© Ellen Mary

Above: Thyme will grow in partial shade but is much happier in full sun

How to grow thyme

Thyme will thrive in well-drained soil and full sun. I have some growing in my herb patch on the allotment; it is slightly overshadowed by some overgrown rosemary, having initially been planted as edging. The thyme tolerates shade but definitely prefers the sunshine - think of the Mediterranean climate. You need at least six hours of sunshine for a fully thriving plant.

My soil is sandy, which works well for drought-tolerant herbs, but if you are gardening on heavy clay, it is better to grow thyme in pots or raised beds as it won't thank you for soggy roots. Water when first planted and during dry weather, especially if you're growing in pots, but otherwise thyme is a self-sufficient stalwart.

In very cold weather, move the pots to a sheltered spot and group them together for warmth. Ideally, plant thyme outside in spring, or try growing it on a sunny windowsill inside at any time of the year. It will provide some fresh sprigs for culinary uses and a wonderful fragrance as well. If you have established thyme in the garden, you can harvest it almost all year.

Above: If you garden on heavy clay, you will have more success with thyme if you grow it in raised beds or pots of peat-free compost

Thyme is a versatile herb that can be used in cookery, traditional remedies and as a relaxing bath soak - but always seek medical advice before trying herbal remedies

Projects with thyme

Thyme is a powerhouse plant, rich in many vitamins including C and A, plus minerals such as iron and magnesium, and antioxidants. Its regular use supports immunity, decreases inflammation and maintains good metabolic functions. It can be made into medicinal concoctions to treat coughs, colds and chest infections due to its antiseptic and antimicrobial properties. Thymol (an active compound in thyme) is used in many sore throat treatments, something that's backed by science.

© Ellen Mary

Above: Irritating coughs and sore throats can be soothed with a syrup of thyme and honey

Project 1 – thyme cough and sore throat syrup

- Rinse a handful of freshly harvested thyme and pat dry.
- Release the oils by gently rubbing or lightly crushing the leaves.
- Place the thyme in a sterilised jar and pour some locally made honey over the sprigs until completely covered
- Seal the jar and leave in a cool, dark place for about seven days to infuse. Strain before use if preferred.
- If you notice a cough, or sore throat coming on, take a teaspoon straightaway.

Treat yourself to a soothing, scented thyme bath

© Shutterstock

Project 2 – thyme bath soak

Rose and lavender might be more popular, but have you ever had a thyme bath? It's soothing, calming and scented, all properties that help stress and tension to simply float away.

How to make:

- Dry some thyme by creating small bundles and hanging up in a cool, dry place.
- Fill drawstring or muslin bags with the dried thyme and tie tightly.
- Store in an airtight container, label and store in the bathroom.
- Add a bag to the bath water as it runs and relax in the warm water. Perfect after a day of gardening.

Adding bags of dried thyme sprigs to your bath water makes a warm and calming soak

© Ellen Mary

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GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**

Brief encounters with morning's star performer

Grow morning glory for a display of prolific but short-lived blooms

Morning glory, or *Ipomoea purpurea*, is one of my favourite annual climbers but also, frustratingly, one of the ones I find hardest to grow from seed.

I love the way they swiftly twine their way up through a trellis or even an obliging tree or shrub, and produce numerous boldly coloured, trumpet-shaped flowers.

Sadly, these blooms only last a day, if that in hot weather, but by regular deadheading you can keep them flowering throughout the summer and into autumn in warm, sunny years.

They are half hardy and don't care at all for our chilly, damp winters, but next spring I'm going to have another go and sow some seeds, nurture them in the warmth and keep fingers crossed for a good result.

The seeds are quite large and have a hard casing, so ideally they should be soaked in water for up to 24 hours before sowing. Alternatively, you can carefully nick them with a sharp knife - both these techniques should help with successful germination.

Above: 'Star of Yelta' is a popular morning glory plant with dramatic dark purple blooms

The seeds should be sown in early to mid-spring, around 2.5cm (1in) deep in good quality, peat-free seed compost. When the seedlings appear, grow them somewhere warm and well-lit and support them with thin twigs or canes.

Once the frosts have passed, harden off your young plants and add them to the garden close to suitable supports, feed them with a liquid tomato feed every 10 days or so and encourage lots of natural predators into the garden to pick off pests.

Favourite varieties include 'Grandpa Otts', which produces large blue flowers, and 'Star of Yelta', with eye-catching deep purple blooms with pink veins. Stunning!

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A sweet summer sight

Tobacco plants will flower for weeks

- Tobacco plants, *Nicotiana spp*, are one of my must-have summer plants and I am always on the look-out for a new variety.
- 'Marshmallow' is a *N.mutabilis* cultivar that produces a froth of sweet flowers that change colour as they mature, shifting from white through various shades of pink.
- Tobacco plants are half hardy, so wait until the spring to sow them undercover, keeping seedlings somewhere frost-free and light indoors - a greenhouse or light windowsill are ideal. They should be planted out after they have been hardened off and the frosts have finished.
- Nicotiana like a sunny spot with fertile, free-draining soil. You can aid their prolific flowering by feeding them with tomato fertiliser once buds have formed and through the summer.
- Regular deadheading will keep the blooms coming for weeks on end.
- Do be aware, however, that the plants are poisonous and can cause skin irritation, so wear gloves when handling and don't let children or pets eat them.

'Marshmallow' flowers change colour from white to pink as they mature

What's On

14 Nov: Bug Hotels workshop, RHS Garden Bridgewater, Occupation Road, Worsley, Manchester M28 2LJ.
15 Nov: Max Walters Memorial Lecture given by clematis expert Raymond Evison, The William Collyn Centre, Wellbrook Way, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0GP. Doors 2pm, lecture 2.30pm, £12 Plant Heritage members, and students, £15 for visitors, free parking. Email Rosemary Buisseret to apply for tickets/ information: ppsrjb@gmail.com
15 Nov: Plant Swap, Community Hub at Manchester Craft and Design Centre, 17 Oak Street, Manchester, M4 5JD. Noon-1pm, Come and swap your plants, seeds, or cuttings and grow your collection and meet other plant lovers.
21 Nov: An Introduction to Soil, RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Discover the life and mysteries of what's beneath our feet.
22 Nov: Wokingham Horticultural Association's Winter Flower Show, St Paul's Parish Rooms, Reading Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG41 1EH. 2pm, plant and produce sales, local honey, and home-made cakes for sale at the tea bar, plus Christmas gifts made by the Craft Group.
22 Nov: Absolute Beginners Make Your Own Compost, RHS Garden Wisley, Wisley Lane, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Learn how to save money and resources making your own 'black gold'.
30 Nov: Light up a Life: Holme for Gardens, West Holme, Wareham BH20 6AQ. Dedicate a light to a loved one at this special remembrance service with Weldmar Hospice. 4pm.
30 Nov: Bonsai Workshop at Gordale Garden Centre, Chester High Road (A540), Burton, South Wirral, Cheshire, CH64 8TF. 11am.
1 Dec: Plant Swap, Streatham Common Park, Streatham Common, South London, SW16 3BX. Events include the plant swap, raffle, guided meditation, live performances, and more.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What are these camellia 'apples'?

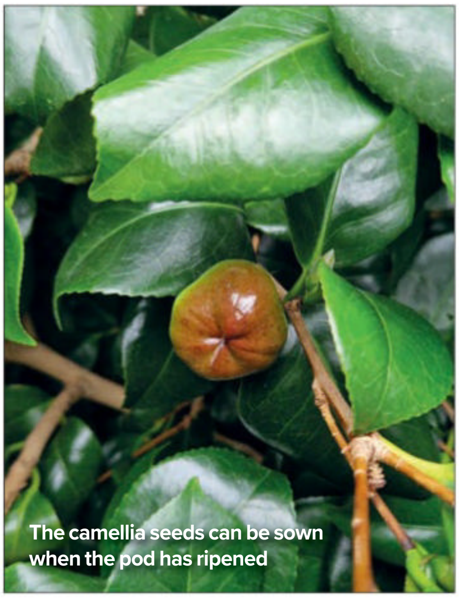
Seeds from camellia pods are sown in autumn

Q A beautiful, very healthy camellia (13 years old), has produced two 'apples' this year. What are they? I love the magazine, having been a subscriber for many, many years. So glad it has been resurrected, and I much prefer the paper it is now printed on as the old paper reflected our lights and made it difficult to read!
Yvonne Eady (via email)

A Thank you for your kind comments. We, too, are so pleased that we've revived our beloved magazine and it is doing so well.

As for the 'apples' on your camellia, these are actually seed pods, each filled with three to 12 seeds.

If you enjoy propagating plants and would like to raise some camellias from seed, wait until seed pods mature, turn brown and split to reveal their seeds, which usually takes place in late autumn.



The camellia seeds can be sown when the pod has ripened

Then remove seeds and keep them dry until spring, when they should be sown 5cm (2in) deep in ericaceous compost, which is kept damp.

Seedlings will appear several months later and take around five years to flower, during which time you must take great care of them. Interestingly, blooms may be similar to or totally different from those of the parent.

What will grow in our north-facing porch?

Q We have a north-facing porch with good windows so it does get light. What houseplants do you think would grow happily in these conditions?
Peter and Mary White

A A porch with plenty of greenery makes a welcoming entrance to the home.

I suggest you grow the following shade-tolerant house plants in your north-facing porch:

Streptocarpus: Also called Cape primrose, its long display of trumpet-shaped blooms come in many colours.

Aglaonema: Also known as Chinese evergreen, its fetching silvery-banded leaves rivet attention. Look out for 'Silver Spear', which I think is the most colourful variety.

Aspidistra: Architecturally handsome, its large broad leaves become a focal point.

All are easy to care for and are normally stocked by larger garden centres.

Above: Streptocarpus will thrive in a north-facing porch

Quick questions & answers

Above: Scented and sonic deterrents will stop cats fouling seedbeds

How can I deter cats?

Q How can I stop cats using our garden as a toilet?
Dave Seymour, Wiltshire

A There is no infallible answer, but there are several ways you can deter them.

Organic, scented deterrents are widely available from garden centres and there are many sonic products available online.

You can also consider growing strongly scented plants such as rosemary, pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) and lavender, which they don't like, or covering bare soil with ground cover plants.

Another ruse is to cover soil with thorny prunings, holly leaves or a lattice of sticks.

Can you name this new arrival?

Q Please can you name this sapling that appeared in the garden this year?
Ruth Hannam (via email)

A I feel sure that the interloper is goat willow (*Salix caprea*).

A robust native of Britain and Ireland and other parts of Eurasia, it probably appeared as a consequence of a bird eating a seed, then 'depositing' it in your border. It makes a tall tree, to around 22m (73ft), but it can be pruned to a more manageable height.

If you have room, I urge you to keep it as a food plant for many insects, including butterflies.

Left: Goat willow, also known as pussy willow, is good for insects

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Please can you suggest some easy container shrubs?

Cistus will happily grow in a container

Perfect for low-maintenance spring and summer colour

Q As I get older I am trying to make my garden easier to manage, so please can you suggest a selection of plants that flower in spring and summer and will thrive in pots all year?
Margaret Foster, Lincoln

A I suggest that you plant the following shrubs in pots to bring colour to spring and summer:

Spring
***Azalea* 'Hino-crimson':** Evergreen; thickly sleeved with small scarlet blooms. Holds the Award of Garden Merit (AGM) from the RHS.
***Pieris japonica* 'Debutante':** Evergreen; massed with white flowers.
***Choisya ternata* Sundance ('Lich'):** Mexican orange blossom is evergreen and prized for its glowing yellow foliage and white blooms. Holds AGM.
***Corylopsis pauciflora*:** The buttercup witch hazel has primrose-yellow flowers and holds AGM.
Summer
***Cistus* x *purpureus* 'Alan Fradd':** Evergreen; white blooms with a chocolate blotch.
***Cotoneaster* x *suecicus* 'Coral Beauty':** Evergreen; large bright orange fruits in autumn. Holds AGM
***Daphne* x *burkwoodii* 'Somerset':** Soft mauve-pink flowers. Holds AGM.
***Escallonia laevis* 'Gold Brian':** Golden foliage, red blooms.

You may be able to find bare-root plants this autumn, which will be cheaper and more environmentally sustainable.

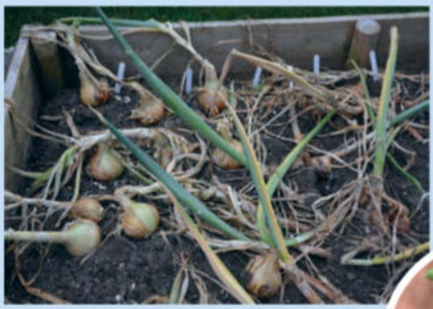
I suggest that you set most, apart from the azalea, pieris and corylopsis which need an ericaceous mix, in peat-free compost that has been supplemented with granular fertiliser. Raise the pots on feet so excess water can run out.

Will my onions survive the winter?

Q I planted some 'Stuttgart' onion sets back in January and although they grew well, they died back in summer - probably because it was so dry and I didn't water them enough. However, they have now revived. Will they survive winter or should I start again?
Peter Seymour, Manchester

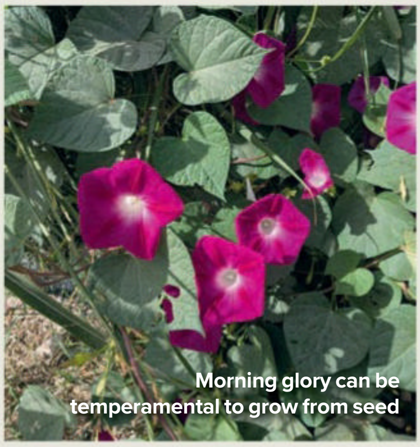
A Onions are fully hardy so frosts and other winter weather should not harm them. However, they may have been weakened by the summer's drought, so I would recommend covering them with cloches to give them some protection and maintain a steady climate.

Though they will make little growth from now until it warms up in spring, they still could produce a decent crop. Help them on their way by watering freely and liquid-feeding regularly from spring to late summer when bulbs are bulking up.



Above: These onions are hardy and will happily sit out the cold

Quick questions & answers



Morning glory can be temperamental to grow from seed

Growing morning glory from seed

Q Can I propagate morning glory from collected seed?
Sara Chedley (via email)

A Morning glory can be tricky to grow, so congratulations if yours have flourished.

Yes, you can sow from harvested seed. Wait for seed pods to form. Gather seeds when fully ripe and store them in a greaseproof bag indoors or in a frost-free shed for winter. Then sow them in spring.

Pelly cuttings through the winter

Q I have taken some tender geranium cuttings and they are in individual pots and starting to bud. What do I do with them?
Sue Hollis (via email)

A Now that your tender geraniums, or pelargoniums, are growing strongly, it's important to keep them going over winter.

The best way is to consign them to a heated, frost-free greenhouse or warm, sunny windowsill indoors where they will grow slowly.

Pinch out the flower buds. Water carefully, keeping potting compost damp but not soggy.

If they become leggy, cut them back by half their height.

Left: Pinch out flower buds so energy isn't wasted

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Why hasn't my hydrangea flowered yet?

Climbing varieties can take several years to reach flowering maturity

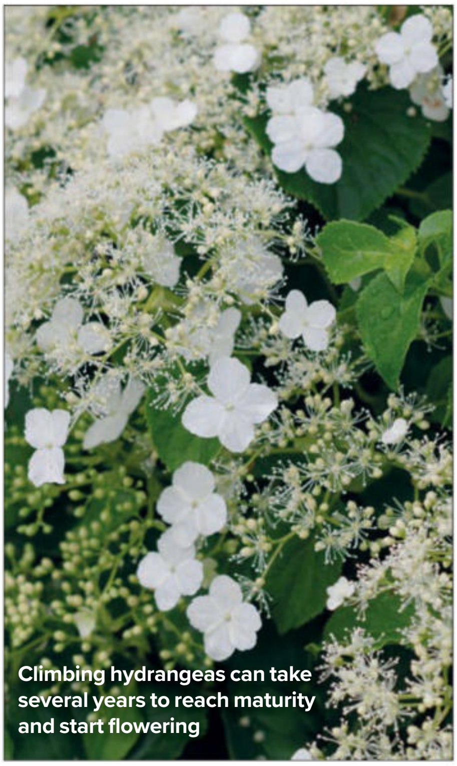
Q I have had a climbing hydrangea for about six years and it hasn't flowered. What should I do to rectify this?
Cyril Jones-Evans (via email)

A I am sorry that your climbing hydrangea, presumably *H. petiolaris*, has yet to flower. Unfortunately, it can take several years from planting to blossoming. Mine was around four years old before it deigned to bloom.

As yours still hasn't flowered after six years, I urge you to encourage it to perform by feeding it monthly, from April until September, with sulphate of potash to boost potatssium levels. Water it in. Do this every year until flowers appear.

Hopefully, this treatment will quickly reward you with a riveting display of large white 'cartwheels' that will have you enjoying them for several weeks.

That's not all, another glorious moment is when its leaves turn butter-yellow in autumn, before they fall.



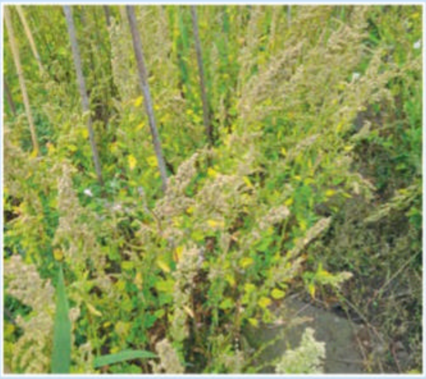
Climbing hydrangeas can take several years to reach maturity and start flowering

Tackle this pushy plant before it takes over your allotment

Q I hope you could help and advise me on what this weed is in the attached picture. My allotment has been inundated with this weed this year
Ian Grey (via email)

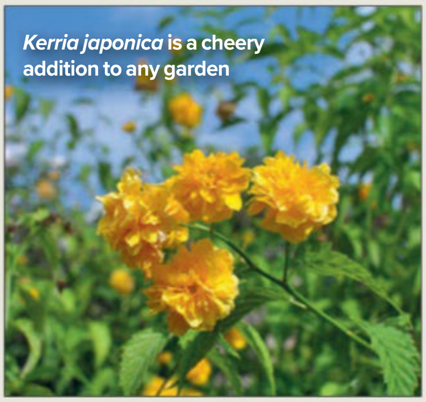
A Thank you for an image of common orache (*Atriplex patula*). It is edible and has a lovely chard-like flavour but obviously too much is an issue. Unfortunately, all that rain we had in spring, followed by long spells of hot weather, are just what it likes, and the result is a wealth of flowers followed by rapidly ripening seeds, which are quickly dispersed and germinate quickly.

A weather-resistant and fast-spreading perennial, it's best kept in check by hoeing it out and consigning it to your council's green waste bin, or covering the ground with cardboard or weed membrane. If you want to keep some growing (and foraging gardeners love this plant) then just do so in a contained area so it doesn't spread so much.



Above: Oracle can be fast-spreading

Quick questions & answers



Kerria japonica is a cheery addition to any garden

What is this pretty shrub?

Q Please could you identify this plant in our neighbour's garden?
Stephen Joyce (via email)

A The shrub in question is double-flowered Japanese rose (*Kerria japonica* 'Pleniflora'). Prized for its double, pompon-like flowers, it richly colours spring.

An even more dramatic variety is single-flowered 'Golden Guinea', sporting large yellow blooms.

K. japonica hails from China and Japan and is enjoyed as much for its pea-green stems as its blooms.

A plant to cheer the shortening days

Q Please could you put a name to this gorgeous plant?
J Wilson (via email)

A The fetching mystery flower is *Crinum* x *powellii*. A garden-bred hybrid between *Crinum bulbispermum* and *C. moorei*, it is a deciduous perennial that truly cheers late summer and autumn.

The genus *Crinum* is a native of tropical South Africa and other warm regions of the world.

If it's growing strongly and you wish to propagate it, divide it carefully in spring when the soil is warming nicely and replant offsets from the main bulb in fertile soil in a sunny, free-draining spot.

Right: Crinum will thrive in free-draining sheltered spots

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Your LETTERS TO KIM

We love receiving your letters, emails and social media posts. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine as soon as we can, so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

Impressive pumpkin harvest helps charity

Hi Kim
Last year my daughter Rebecca took a small selection of pumpkins that I grew to decorate her office windowsill.They were admired so much.

We have had a fantastic crop of over 130 pumpkins this year from the allotment so Rebecca thought of the idea to take a few pumkins to her workplace to see if there was interest from the staff and to collect any kind donations for the Guide Dogs charity.

The few pumpkins she took caused a sensational response with requests : “Have you more pumpkins” so all the 130 were taken. Rebecca said all the staff have been so generous.

A final total of £260 has been raised for Guide Dogs.

I hope that you like the photo which shows the varieties we grew.

Best wishes
Steve Watkin Co Durham

Kim says; that’s just so lovely Steve and Rebecca. So inspiring - congratulations and keep up the amazing work you do.

£260
Guide Dogs

Steve Watkin with his daughter Rebecca raised money for the Guide Dogs Charity with their bumper pumpkin harvest

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How bluebells used to be used

Dear Kim,
I thought I would share this fascinating fact with your readers. The native bluebell contains a sticky substance in the bulb and stem that was once used as an adhesive for binding pages into books and attaching feathers to arrows. During the Elizabethan era, this juice was used as a laundry starch substitute, to stiffen decorative ruffs on collars and sleeves. I hate to think what allergic reactions that caused!

Kind regards
Karina Weeks

Kim says: Karina, that is absolutely fascinating, thank you so much for sharing. It’s so interesting to know how our ancestors used to connect with and use the plants we commonly see in our gardens today. If readers have any other examples please do share, we’d love to hear.

Reader Karina reveals a fascinating past use of the beautiful bluebell

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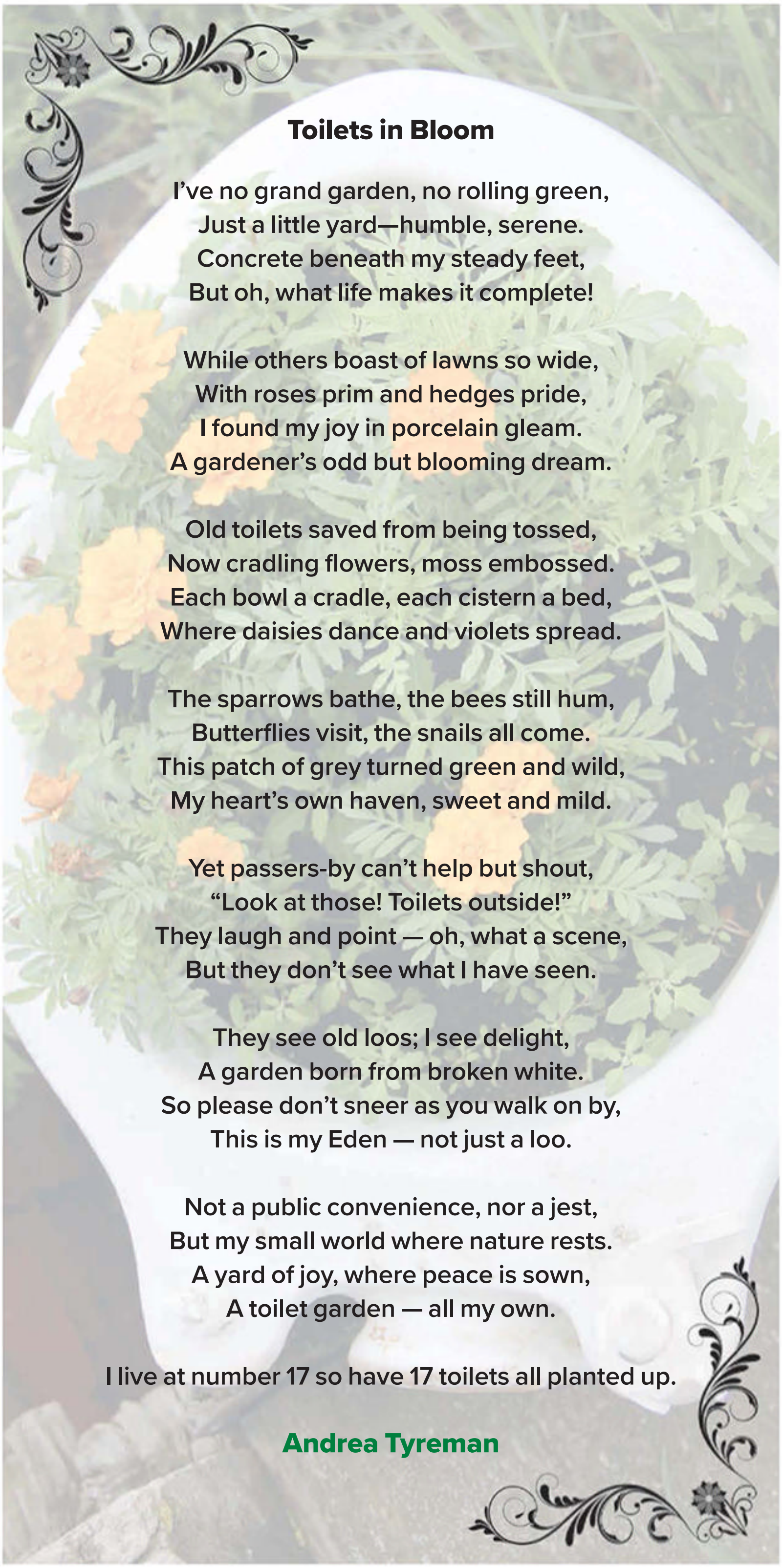
Poetry corner special

We would love to have more poetry on these pages. You don't need be an expert, and the process of writing is an incredibly therapeutic and enjoyable form of expression. Please do email and write in and we'll share what we can on these pages.



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Toilets in Bloom

I've no grand garden, no rolling green,
Just a little yard—humble, serene.
Concrete beneath my steady feet,
But oh, what life makes it complete!

While others boast of lawns so wide,
With roses prim and hedges pride,
I found my joy in porcelain gleam.
A gardener's odd but blooming dream.

Old toilets saved from being tossed,
Now cradling flowers, moss embossed.
Each bowl a cradle, each cistern a bed,
Where daisies dance and violets spread.

The sparrows bathe, the bees still hum,
Butterflies visit, the snails all come.
This patch of grey turned green and wild,
My heart's own haven, sweet and mild.

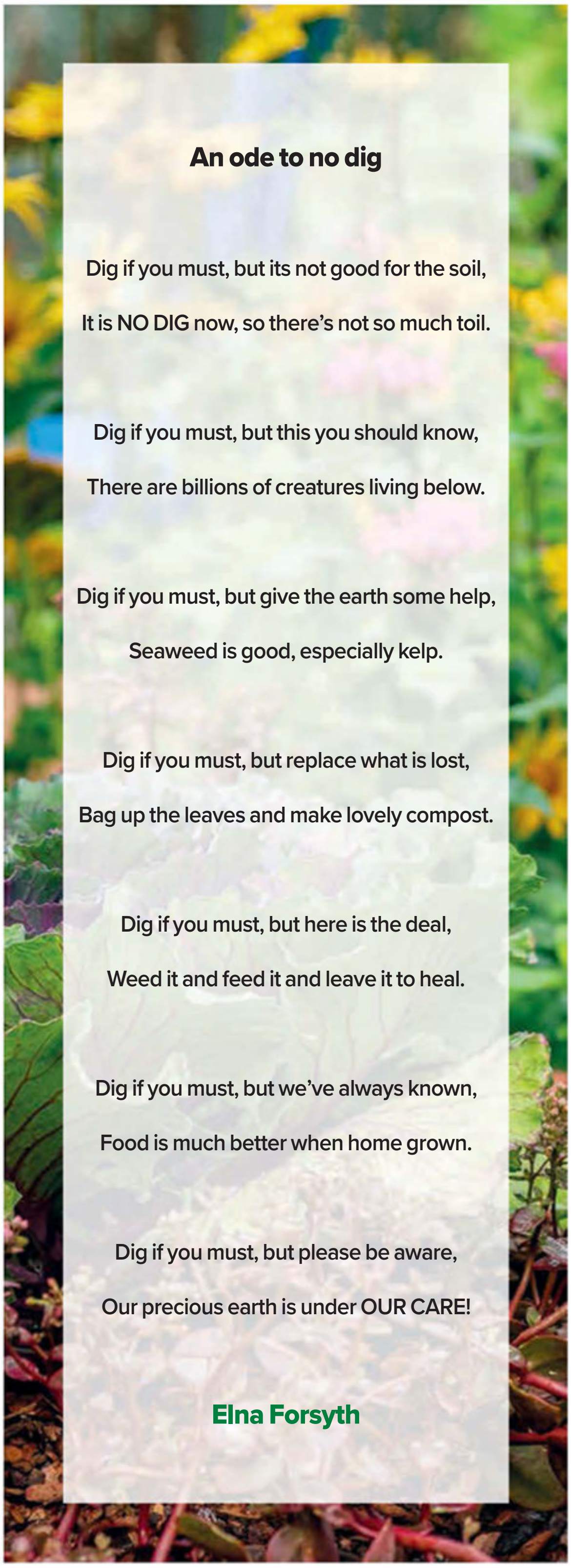
Yet passers-by can't help but shout,
"Look at those! Toilets outside!"
They laugh and point — oh, what a scene,
But they don't see what I have seen.

They see old loos; I see delight,
A garden born from broken white.
So please don't sneer as you walk on by,
This is my Eden — not just a loo.

Not a public convenience, nor a jest,
But my small world where nature rests.
A yard of joy, where peace is sown,
A toilet garden — all my own.

I live at number 17 so have 17 toilets all planted up.

Andrea Tyreman



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An ode to no dig

Dig if you must, but its not good for the soil,
It is NO DIG now, so there's not so much toil.

Dig if you must, but this you should know,
There are billions of creatures living below.

Dig if you must, but give the earth some help,
Seaweed is good, especially kelp.

Dig if you must, but replace what is lost,
Bag up the leaves and make lovely compost.

Dig if you must, but here is the deal,
Weed it and feed it and leave it to heal.

Dig if you must, but we've always known,
Food is much better when home grown.

Dig if you must, but please be aware,
Our precious earth is under OUR CARE!

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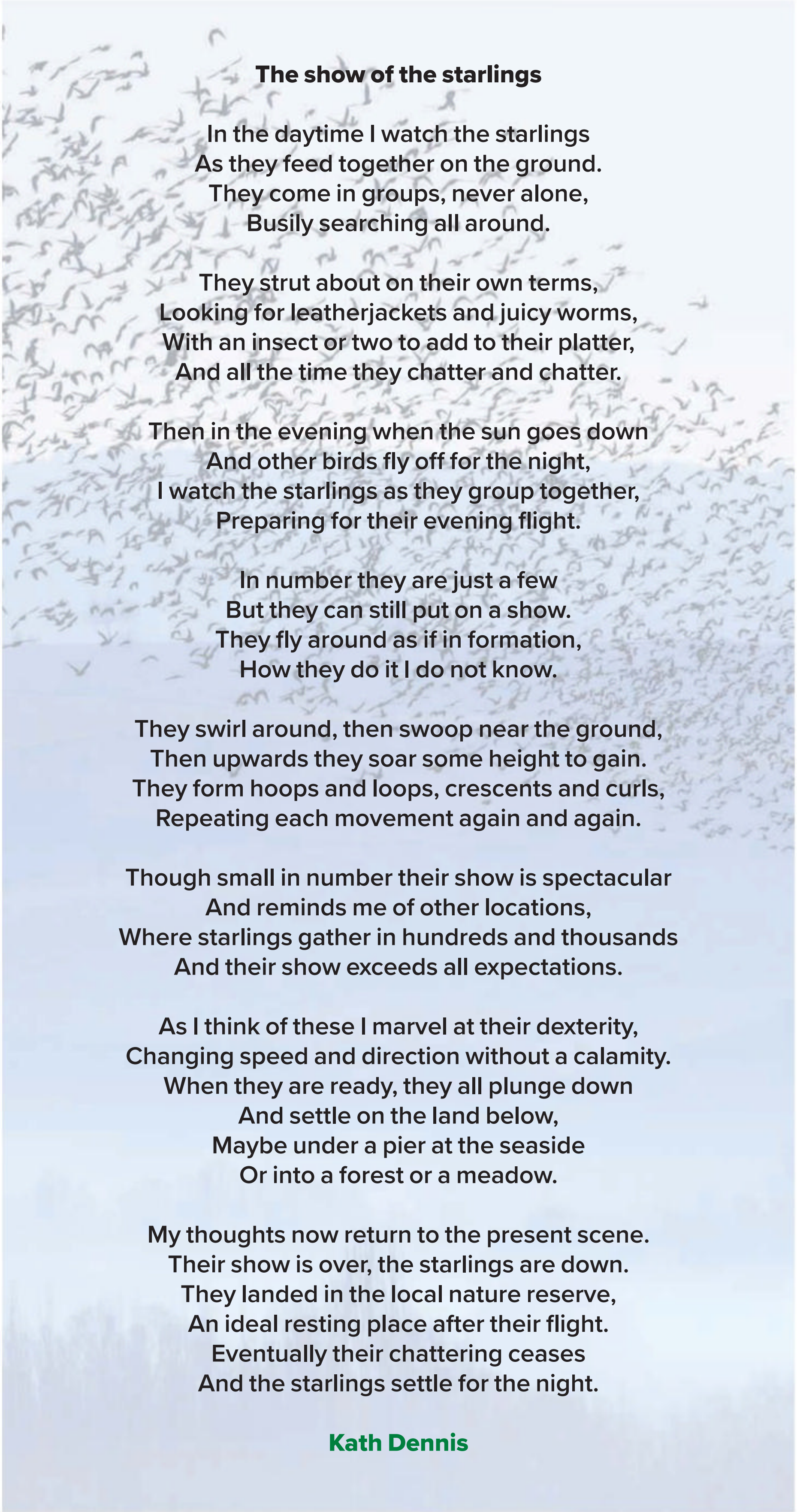

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The show of the starlings

In the daytime I watch the starlings
As they feed together on the ground.
They come in groups, never alone,
Busily searching all around.

They strut about on their own terms,
Looking for leatherjackets and juicy worms,
With an insect or two to add to their platter,
And all the time they chatter and chatter.

Then in the evening when the sun goes down
And other birds fly off for the night,
I watch the starlings as they group together,
Preparing for their evening flight.

In number they are just a few
But they can still put on a show.
They fly around as if in formation,
How they do it I do not know.

They swirl around, then swoop near the ground,
Then upwards they soar some height to gain.
They form hoops and loops, crescents and curls,
Repeating each movement again and again.

Though small in number their show is spectacular
And reminds me of other locations,
Where starlings gather in hundreds and thousands
And their show exceeds all expectations.

As I think of these I marvel at their dexterity,
Changing speed and direction without a calamity.
When they are ready, they all plunge down
And settle on the land below,
Maybe under a pier at the seaside
Or into a forest or a meadow.

My thoughts now return to the present scene.
Their show is over, the starlings are down.
They landed in the local nature reserve,
An ideal resting place after their flight.
Eventually their chattering ceases
And the starlings settle for the night.

Kath Dennis

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine, now and for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

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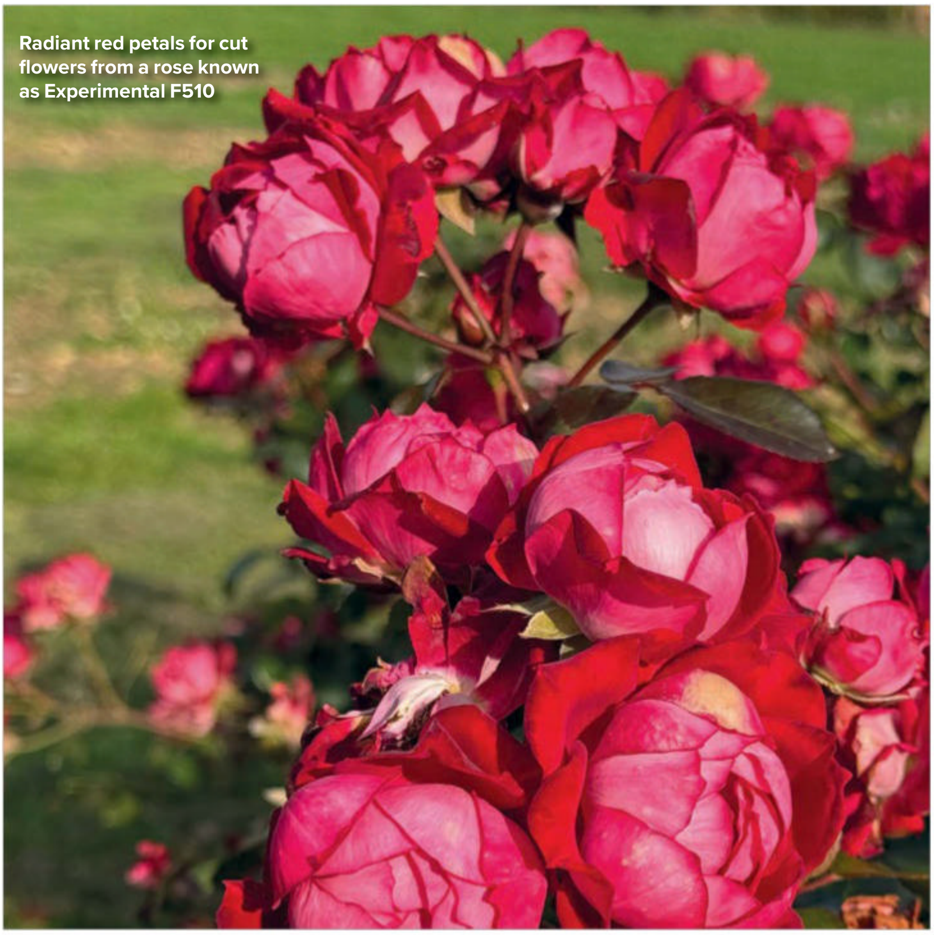
PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman



Radiant red petals for cut flowers from a rose known as Experimental F510

7 roses of the future

Michael reveals some exciting new varieties coming soon

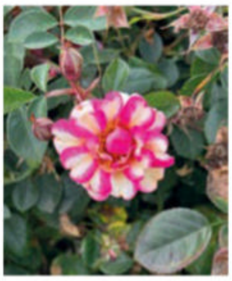
Within the grounds of Hertfordshire-based Rochfords, one of the largest plant cash-and-carry outlets in the UK, the International Rose Trials are quietly shaping the future of rose breeding.

Founded in 2019 after the closure of the original Rose Society site, Rochfords is now an accredited trial centre under World Federation guidelines. Each new rose variety is judged many times over three years, and gold or silver winners automatically progress to the coveted Award of Garden Merit from the RHS.

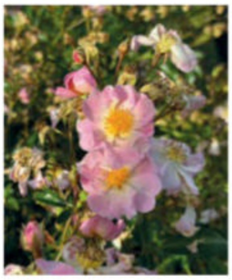
Open to amateur and professional breeders, the trials attract many entrants, including David Austin Roses. Each grower submits five plants free of charge.

Committed to sustainable growing, Rochfords has been peat-free for over two years and uses companion plants like phacelia to attract helpful insects. With breeding now blurring traditional categories, today's roses are more adaptable than ever and are fit for gardens, landscapes, and even containers.

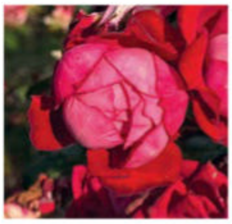
Here's my pick of seven of the most exciting varieties, so new that many don't even have names yet.



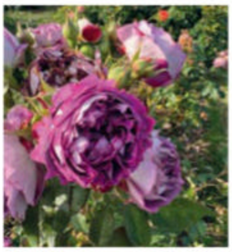
Sweet Shop
Bred by Chris Warner in the UK, this was a standout for me. Really fun blooms with a distinctive stripe and a nice raspberry scent. It's easy to grow, and when pruning you simply need to shear it back.



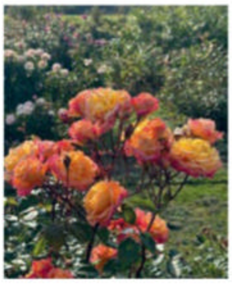
Experimental M501
This beauty won the pollinator award during this year's rose trials and is a gorgeous ground cover specimen, with repeat blooming and a lovely pink flower.



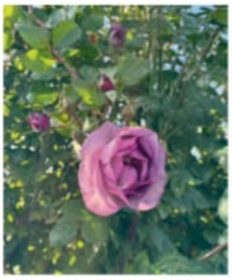
Experimental F510
I loved these 'golf-ball' flowers with red petals holding a distinctive white backing. This one would be an ace cut flower I think.



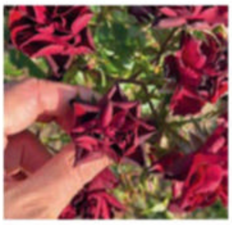
Experimental F524
'Blue' roses are so special, however you classify the colour. This huge-flowered type also has a nice ruffle, and is a very fine border rose.



Papagayo
By Kordes, the German rose innovators, I selected this for its attractive red stems, which really set off the plant's peachy, highly fragrant flower heads.



Experimental C504
I nicknamed this one 'the bamboo rose', as the stems had an exceptional girth and are ever so strong. It also has super cool purple-blue flowers with a sherbet scent.



Experimental Origami
This scarlet beauty is a lovely bush rose, and as the blooms age they fold in like the most beautiful origami.

mrplantgeek.substack.com

All images © Michael Perry

TOBY'S TALKING
WILDER WINTER GARDENS

Take a leaf from Mother Nature and let some autumn leaves and past-it stems break down in situ to feed the earth

How to prepare your garden for winter and wildlife

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Toby explains why nature leads the way when it comes to 'chopping and dropping' nowadays

Are you a gardener that snips up spent stems, flowerheads and foliage and lets it rot down where it falls - also known as a 'chop and dropper', or are you a 'clearer out' who collects and barrows the above to the compost heap?

I'm a 'drop-out', as I do a bit of both. In places where leaf litter might smother smaller plants, I clear it, and I'll remove leaves and debris from border edges to stop them blowing onto the walkways. I'm also fastidious about removing leaves from veg beds as I like to ensure the birds get to peck off molluscs and naughty plant-eating pals in plain sight.

For the most part though, I chop 'n' drop dead flower heads and stems where they are. After all, Mother Nature doesn't go around with a rake when autumn arrives in woodlands and prairies. She just leaves the 'litter' for fungi and composting organisms to feast on and turn into dark rich humus - that crucial, nutrient-releasing component of healthy soil.

It wasn't so long ago, though, that leaving any dead flower stems was regarded as a sign of neglect and my first experiments, copying Mother Nature's 'just leave it' technique, got me into trouble.

Toby likes to feel his way with cutting back and clearing plants using his instincts about what is needed in the here and now

Digging over beds also used to be the norm pre-winter but protecting the soil is key so mulching has mainly replaced this practice

How neat and tidy winter beds used to be the norm

This was in the 1990s, before chopping 'n' dropping had a name, when I was working at Cambridge Botanic Gardens. I was the herbaceous supervisor, charged with clearing the gargantuan island flower beds of spent leaves and flower stems.

It was the kind of winter work I enjoyed, but as the beds were bigger than a tennis court and I was well behind schedule, I struck on a cunning plan, bolted a brush-cutter blade to a strimmer, and noisily reduced the stems into a mulch of short twigs that I left on the soil.

To say this approach was *avant-garde* would be an understatement and although my bosses applauded the time-saving use of tools, bare earth tickled over with a fork to remove footprints was the norm. It was also what the friends of the garden and the visiting public expected to see and deviation would be perceived as a drop in standards and 'invite negative feedback'.

And they were right… almost as soon as the strimmer was hung back in the shed, the complaints came in. Some visitors worried that the power-tools had 'rough-housed' and killed the plants, but most were concerned that the beds looked 'messy'. There was even a letter demanding that the so-called 'gardener' responsible for the 'damage' should be banned from going near plants ever again!

Well, if there's one thing I've learnt, everyone is an expert when it comes to gardening, even people who don't do it. But to be fair to the visitors who complained, gardening was different back then. Our understanding of what was good for the soil was based on a set, almost formulaic, timetable. From mid-November, gardens were treated like over-tired toddlers in need of being 'put to bed'. There was a clear break between autumn and winter when beds were literally cleared, and anything different was 'doing it wrong'.

Labour-intensive work was part of the routine, especially in parks departments where huge summer and winter bedding schemes were raised by hand and seed was grown 'in-house' under acres of glass. Thanks to budget cuts, those days are gone and now 'hacks' to save energy and time are the order of the day.

How the winter garden is viewed now

Another difference is the change in what we like to see as the 'aesthetics' of our gardens. Seedheads silhouetted in the sun are no longer perceived as a job that needs doing but are beautiful in their own right. Umbels like *Achillea spp* are like living Angie Lewin linocuts, while the ash-white frames of cardoons and sedums are wonderful when frosted and left to catch cobwebs.

Our appreciation of wildlife has also changed attitudes about what and whom a garden is for. It's now a space that's shared with nature, and chopping and dropping is better for wildlife and natural pest control than bunging the lot in a compost heap. Most spent flowers have hollow stems that double as hibernation homes for ladybirds, lacewings and solitary bees. Buried in the compost heap, these insects might perish; but left where they are, they're more likely to survive to the next growing season and be on hand to pollinate and keep unwanted pests in check.

Tender plants now limp on in autumn

The weather has also changed. According to the Met Office, up until the 1990s, autumn temperatures in the South East averaged 5.8°C (42.4F). Since then they've risen to 7°C (44.6F), with the last three autumns being the mildest on record. Gardens that once turned to tundra in November are home to salvias in flower right through until December, and plants

Above: Toby prefers to clear leaves from beds and paths but will leave stems and debris at the back of borders and where it can be used by hibernating mini-beasts

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Leaving plant stems in place through the cold months adds interest and texture to the quiet garden

that would normally die back now limp on. Where once it was expedient to go through a border in one go, I cut as and when plants get on my nerves, whether by falling on their neighbours or over a path. In short, what was a blitz job is now tackled piecemeal by instinct rather than timetable.

Crack open the compost for mulching

I wouldn't be without a compost heap - it's essential for kitchen waste, grass clippings and cardboard. And I mention this, because now is the time to crack it open and get the good stuff out from the base. This makes room for spent veggies and leaves swept from the paths but also gets the job done before any wildlife holes up inside for winter. The good stuff I use when planting or as a mulch to keep chopped stems in place. If I'd done that at the botanic garden, I wouldn't have got so much grief. We live and learn!

Above: **Many seedheads reveal their austere natural beauty in the winter months**

Above: Toby recommends foraging for useable compost at the bottom of the pile for mulching

Above: **Cardoon is just one of the plants that provide attractive structure to winter gardens and help feed and house wildlife over winter**

Plants worth growing and leaving for their seedheads

Miscanthus - all flowering types have fabulous silver seedheads, but my favourite is *M.* 'Morning Light' as the green leaves have a silver 'go-faster' stripes down their edges.

Thistles like cardoons, echinops, sea holly and teasels look fab and architectural.

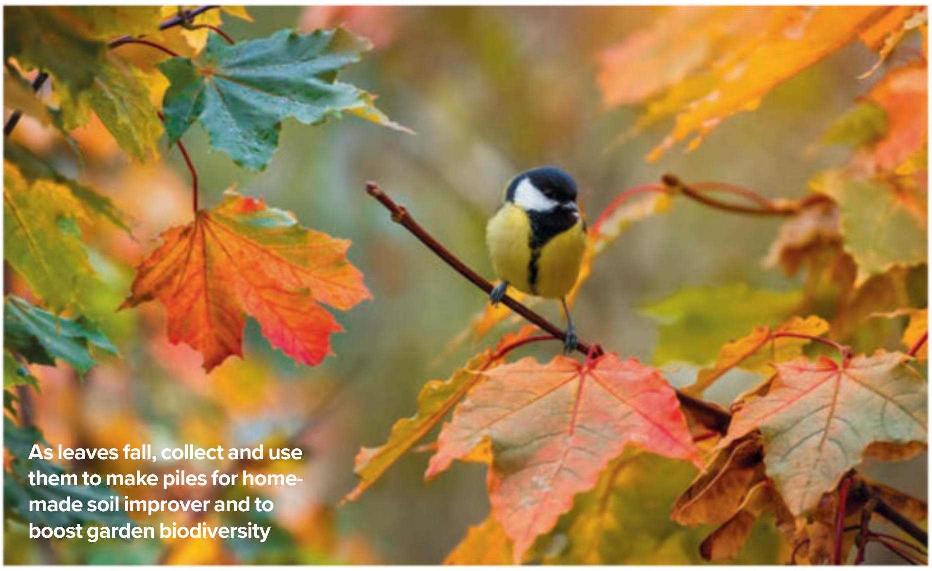
Prairie perennials such as rudbeckias, sedums, asters and phlomis are great *en masse,* creating tawny-coloured cushions of spent blooms.

GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing *AG* contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

How to use leaves to boost soil and garden health

Bob explains how to make the most of autumn's priceless bounty



As leaves fall, collect and use them to make piles for home-made soil improver and to boost garden biodiversity

The leaves have fallen and although some have been cleared away, many are just piled up here and there. If they were £5 notes you'd grab them, and by the barrowload these are almost just as valuable.

You see, leaves were long regarded as 'untidy dead stuff' so we had smouldering bonfires to 'be rid of them'. Fortunately, most folk realised this was foolishness and stopped. Admittedly, piles of dead leaves left where they have fallen will cause dead patches of turf, kill low-growing plants and choke almost anything they lay thickly on for long. Even strong-growing horizontal conifers suffer if thatches of leaves are not promptly cleared off them.

When decaying on gravel paths or drives, leaves significantly encourage 'weeds', and to most folk, the sight of leaves piled against walls or 'littering' patios simply need 'tidying'.

Above: Leaves help feed soil life and help overwintering invertebrates, in turn feeding garden birds

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Above: Bob explains how to easily remove leaves from the lawn

Leaves are a brilliant soil booster

But leaves are incredibly beneficial to the garden as they're an amazing source of fertility. Although not dense in nutrients themselves, they feed worms and many other forms of soil micro-life, contributing to their by-products, micro-manures, which are a superlative plant food. Simultaneously, their fibrous remains become humus, the very best soil conditioner. Indeed, it's said that scientists researching ingredients for the John Innes formula of sowing and potting composts reckoned leaf mould was as good as if not better than peat, though it broke down faster. Unfortunately there were no commercial sources so it wasn't practical to use them.

Anyway, leaves being worm food means that in most of the garden, all you have to do is nothing - leave the leaves there and they'll just disappear, so by spring there'll be not a trace, almost like magic. Those that fall under fruit trees and bushes and on shrub or herbaceous borders do a great deal of good so it's worth brushing or blowing the leaves there - though some may blow away unless weighed down with some compost or grass clippings on top.

Those on the lawn are easily collected with the lawnmower, so it may be easiest to brush leaves there before mowing, which usefully also shreds and mixes them with grass clippings. This shredded mix makes an excellent mulch as it stays put, whereas leaf-only mulches can blow about. A shredded leaf/grass mix can also be added to compost, and will break down faster than loads of leaves on their own.

The elixir of plant life

This slowness to break down *en masse* is why we usually stack leaves in a separate bin, traditionally made of wire mesh. I also find a large rusty bottomless barrel works brilliantly. Black plastic bags with some air holes are fine if you pack them full with leaves and put them out of the way. A year or so later the leaves have broken down to a crumbly, brown friable 'peat-substitute for home-compost mixes'.

You cannot buy this, yet it's almost the elixir of life for plants, and you can add sieved leaf mould to almost every sowing and potting compost, even, and especially, ericaceous ones. So it's hugely sensible to collect every leaf you can. You might even become public-spirited, tidy up your local area and offer to do your neighbours' frontages. You might end up with loads of leaf mould and, if lucky, hot drinks and pieces of cake!

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com**

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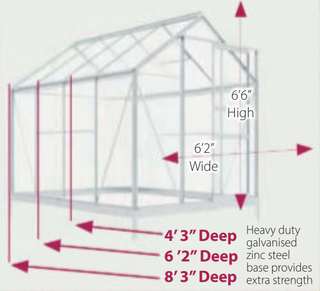
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